

THE ROAD TO INDIA

THE ROAD TO INDIA

by

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LONDON

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

FOREWORD

THIS is not the account of a single journey but the summary of six or seven to the Near East and the Orient, in steamships and aeroplanes, in motor-cars and flying-boats, in railways and yachts. From Asia Minor to the Persian Gulf, from Egypt to Turkey, from Italy to India, from Greece to the Arabian coast, from Egypt to Syria. . . . All the winding curves these wanderings have left on my map for years seem to be joined together in one fanlike stream, and now I want to describe the broadest current in that stream: the road to India.

As many highways lead to India as there are branches of human activities: first there is the economists' road, based on the tonnage in each port and the gauge of the railway tracks; then the chancelleries' road, on which the British Empire stands, an obese martyr who resents all who attempt to tread on his toes. Literary men too, mad creatures with exotic ideas, have a special road to India. de Musset remarked that even a century of "cisterns under palm trees has not completely satisfied them, though they have exhausted most of their readers". There is also the scholars' road, laboriously followed by schoolboys of fifteen who study the retreat of the Ten Thousand and the Median Wars outlined on their blackboards, and there are the roads of the Bible. . . .

FOREWORD

I want, in isolating the dominating factors of this world road, to emphasise how it has persisted for centuries, and to describe the destiny inherent in its course. Passing events have little meaning in the Orient where everything reflects eternity, and the dream of our modern new rich, "the descendance from the Crusaders", would be an unworthy inheritance. From the Crusades to modern times only the Turkish conquest really mattered; that is to say, centuries were as a moment to these territories which have known thousands of conquerors.

In India, more than anywhere else, history depends upon geography; unceasingly humanity has experienced the same forms of government, just as mankind has again and again known recurrent passions. In Asia, everything has been polluted except the sky, and now even the sky is no longer undefiled—aeroplanes have seen to that.

PAUL MORAND.

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PART ONE
THE ROAD OF EMPIRE

THE ROAD OF EMPIRE

"I shall not return."

"Where are you going?"

"Towards the Orient."

GÉRARD DE NERVAL : *Aurelia*.

THE road to India is unique among the thoroughfares of the world because no one can boast of having discovered it. In common with India herself, this road has been known since antiquity. India, which Herodotus called the most famous and the richest country on earth, has always sent her aromatic products to the West, where men have ruined themselves for her treasures as they might have done for the sake of a beautiful but distant woman. Monkeys, peacocks, purple dyes, oils, gold from the Temple of Solomon, all manner of strange and dazzling luxuries have come from India since the days when the Phoenicians lived on the trade in these precious objects and men from Ptolemy journeyed as far as Singapore in search of them.

The Arabian conquest, a disaster for the Oriental Empire, closed the gateway to Egypt and the Red Sea. Immediately afterwards the passage to India was deflected towards the north, and men travelled to the East overland and not by sea.

The Crusades might be interpreted as a struggle for the

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domination of this road which was dedicated to commerce. Marco Polo and Sir John Mandeville had only to follow the trail blazed by others, for this thoroughfare had never ceased to be used. When Genghis Khan and Kublai Khan extended their power from the Chinese seas to the Polish frontiers, they encountered merchants from Genoa and from Lombardy, travellers from Venice and Byzantium, Franciscan and Buddhist monks. The Tatar horsemen thus learned that the " Road of Silk " had not waited until they came to unite two worlds.

It would, indeed, be more exact to call it a track to India, and not a road, because roads are made by men, whereas tracks are products of nature. Tellurian dust cracked the surface of the earth, and then water flowed in these crevices towards the interiors of continents. Nature alone is responsible for the curious gorges, the reservoirs, the tanks, the openings in the ground, for the accidental clefts which nations have been forced to cross, and beyond which, even to-morrow, they must seek their destiny.

When Europeans suddenly hurled themselves along the road to India, they were prompted less by their genius for exploration than by their fervent desire for wealth, which they did not yet possess. Why, then, in later times did they wander aimlessly through the world? What was the reason for these human efforts, these shipwrecks and these wars? What instinct of curiosity prompted Western peoples, so unlikely when left to themselves to choose roads so divergent, some leading East and others West?

This apparent inconsistency is explained by the fact that all Europe was attracted by one goal : India. In his search for that fabled land Christopher Columbus inadvertently discovered America, while Sebastian Cabot, Verrazano,

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Vesputius went out, one after the other, to find northern and southern boundaries to that vast expanse of water, and the Atlantic Ocean and Canada, Manhattan and Brazil arose out of nothingness as a result of their hazardous voyages. In his desire to find a short cut to India, Vasco da Gama, venturing farther and farther into the unknown, was the first to sail round Africa. So late as the eighteenth century, Cook was actually searching for a north-west passage when he hoisted the colours of the King of England among the coral islands of the Pacific. For three centuries white men had only one desire, one instinct—an impressive display of persistent and concentrated effort, a stirring justification of gain and commercial adventure—for three centuries they longed to seize what they did not yet possess, to move implacably towards a horizon which they could see only dimly and in the distance.

The East and the West—like two untouched human beings who may be lovers or enemies but who are passionately attracted each to the other—have longed at any price to be united. They were brought face to face at first by Suez and later, when this direct communication ceased to exist, they gropingly sought each other on circuitous roads.

The death of our civilisations is hard to imagine : it is difficult to conceive that the three continents could again be welded together by the Isthmus, or that the Mediterranean could once more be self-contained and inaccessible to the seas at both ends, so that our most important commodities could not pass through it. If the Suez Canal is the essential artery of world commerce, if the *Bulletin de la Compagnie* and the *Panama Record* register the temperature of our planet, it is because the road to India is the aorta of the universe. The French believed for a moment that

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they could ignore this road. They had lost India and Egypt, and their ambition did not soar beyond the Mediterranean ; but belatedly, when they reconstructed an Asiatic Empire, they created for themselves new grandeurs and new dependencies, without destroying the old.

In the course of history, this road to India has been used for a short time by all of our travellers : by Hiriart the jeweller, who made a throne of enamel peacock feathers for the Grand Mogul ; by Tavernier, who went to Golconda ; by the great adventurers of the seventeenth century : Chardin, Sonnerat, Thévenot, Lespinay, Martin, Le Gentil, Duperron, the first translator of *Upanishads*, by our great missionaries who supplied the scholarly minds of the eighteenth century with ideas, Oriental fantasies and myths.

The genius of France, therefore, as well as the past and future of England, will be discussed in the *Road to India*.

ENGLAND AND THE CALL OF THE ORIENT

I REMEMBER the little church in Derbyshire where, as a child, I went to pray every Sunday. The damp gloomy crypt placed there in the centre of England by the Roman Faith, seemed a relic of those Oriental countries and seas conquered by the Normans in the year one thousand.

The headmaster of the boarding school, too, evoked the memory of the Orient, when, after dinner, he read to us from the Book of Kings: "*Ye shall drink of the waters of the torrents.*"

At once an exotic world rose up before me, a world of rams consecrated in scented sacrifice, of burnt offerings, dances to the accompaniment of trumpets, earthenware jars filled with oil, musicians playing the harp, men weighing silver, old women gathering acacia wood for holocausts, prophets hidden in caves, and kings mounted on chariots. On another Sunday he read to us from Exodus: "*Egypt, house of servitude . . .*" Then the waters would close like a glass door on Pharaoh. The thought of manna made my mouth water, and I, too, desired no other food.

At the end of the term we were taken to London to see *Sindbad the Sailor*. To me, the *Arabian Nights* was an Arabian Bible, more gay and yet more cruel perhaps

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than the real Bible, but with the same smoky atmosphere of meats cooked on a fire of aloe branches. The moment the curtain rose on the first act I saw Sindbad, seated at a table covered with as many golden vessels as those used by the Pharaohs at a banquet. He was stroking his beard and telling the awe-struck sailors about his seven voyages. "... We set sail at Bassorah and travelled to India by way of the Persian Gulf. . . ." Sindbad never reached his destination: some island or other always came between him and India, an island with ramparts of sandalwood, towers of camphor or gateways studded with clove. Stranded on a lonely beach, this passionate traveller struck his stomach in despair, then waved his turban, calling for help. Later he was reported to be missing, but somehow he had managed to save himself, for in further scenes I saw him again in blue and red settings, pretending he was a slave or an Ambassador, a jeweller or a merchant selling coco-nuts. His amazing adventures always ended well. Finally he returned to Baghdad with a hundred thousand rubies, and it seemed to me quite natural that the Caliph Haroun el Raschid should pay heavily for the diamond crown the traveller had so boldly acquired. Nor did it appear odd when the potentate gave Sindbad more vessels destined for future shipwrecks !

Drury Lane is still close to the Strand ; it was built in 1663 and it will probably remain a London landmark for a long time. The theatre's statues of Shakespeare, Garrick and Kean, the bas-relief of Sir Henry Irving, defy the wear of centuries and time passes unnoticed by the gloomy façade, so like a hospital's, by the pit used by generations of English spinsters who have queued up in it,

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by the iron emergency staircase, and by the cast-iron Ionic columns against which, during the day, lean baskets of Brussels sprouts and women selling flowers from Covent Garden. Huge posters, as compelling as those announcing the *Arabian Nights* of my childhood, still adorn the walls of hollow bricks and the Adam recesses. On these posters the genii continue to rescue Sindbad from the sorcerers. Thus, seen for the first time through the fog across the Channel, the Orient leaves in our memories, as it does in the hearts of Englishmen, an indelible impression, the haunting and insatiable desire to take flight into a luminous world, a mad but restrained need of sensuous adventure, a longing which, several times a day, is revived by the Asiatic fragrance of tea.

TEA

How was it possible that Marco Polo, who was so curious, failed to discover tea? For when this Venetian traveller reached China the natives had been drinking tea for two thousand years. Since the end of the sixteenth century Europe had imported almost all objects of value from the Middle Empire—except tea, and fifty years later Pepys announced the arrival in London of a Chinese beverage brought from Amoy, that small harbour surrounded by the consulates of privileged nations, in which there are many rather cheap paintings on glass. Soon the East India Company helped itself to the trade monopoly in this new plant.

Then India, the country where tea was originally discovered, began to produce large quantities for Europeans; tea plantations enriched Bengal; the Dutch planted tea

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in Java. In 1876 Ceylon was industrialised, and her medicinal and black teas, *Ceylon* or *Darjeeling*, *Keemun* or *Papsang*, soon gave the tarry warehouses of the City, as well as Queen Victoria's breakfast-table, an exotic fragrance.

COFFEE

Oriental tea made its way into the drawing-rooms of the bourgeoisie ; coffee penetrated their brains.

Fifteenth-century Arabian writers speak of an Abyssinian berry from Kaffirland which was transplanted in Arabia. In the sixteenth century, the Portuguese brought this berry to south-west Europe ; it reached London in the seventeenth by way of Constantinople and Venice.

Louis XIV was the first man in France to drink coffee, and in England coffee houses were opened in Cornhill as early as 1644. They were so successful that they changed social life. For the first time men and women congregated in a public place : heretofore they had met in public only at Court. Roasted Mocha coffee made its way into the stomachs and so to the grey matter of these slow-thinking Northerners and roused them. The Irish ceased to have a monopoly of wit. Ideas, not resulting in actions, but attractive because of their quick, easy playfulness, moved gaily about in the minds of Englishmen, while German governments tried in vain to prevent individuals without a special licence from roasting these berries, and Charles II made an unsuccessful attempt to close the coffee houses, these new centres of political unrest. Coffee was an epidemic which flowed through the veins of the Western world and excited and changed European

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mentality. Through its influence these Northerners left their own fireplaces and ventured out into the streets where, like Latins, they saw human nature at close range ; and this contact developed the English bourgeois novel which was the father of our own. Affairs of state were no longer a secret, and people told each other the most recent news published in the *corantes*, those first crude newspapers invented by Spanish Jews in Amsterdam. The press, which never sleeps, is truly called the daughter of night ; but coffee is her father. The eloquence of democracy was born of these two parents and they were also responsible for the poetry of Addison. Under their stimulation the spirit of republican equality became the fashion ; lampoons for or against the East India Company circulated in Fleet Street ; philosophical pamphleteers, thoroughly familiar with doctrines, specialised in the popularisation of scientific inventions and swamped the City with systems from which our own Encyclopædists profited half a century later ; and Voltaire's brilliant writings appeared in the *Lettres Anglaises* which, in turn, came from London coffee houses.

The power of coffee grew. The Arabs transplanted Yemen coffee shrubs in Java ; the Dutch imported them to Surinam ; the Portuguese to Ceylon. By the eighteenth century coffee was the basis of wealth in the West Indies.

Narcotic drugs and stimulants are the two faces with which the Goddess of the Orient alternately smiles and grimaces at Europe. Coffee-enervated Classicism and Romanticism were soon to discover the black abyss of human despair : in 1797, at Malta, Coleridge devoured pellets of opium.

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Who will write the political and literary history of drugs, which are as definitely the daughters of the East as is the Kabalah? In the nineteenth century, in the name of hygiene, Europe gave China her rations of artificial sleep—and China disintegrated; Russell Pasha, the Chief of the Central Narcotic Intelligence Bureau, presented to the League of Nations an Egypt which he had freed from poison—but Egypt protested. She would have rebelled more vehemently still if Egyptian peasants had not continued to produce artificial heavens which they fostered determinedly as they saw the gates of their old paradise being closed against them. When Egypt is deprived of hashish, cocaine replaces it; when heroin becomes inaccessible because the price is too high, black tea is consumed; and black tea is a terrible concoction from which, hidden in mud huts, men extract pernicious alkaloids. . . . Cynics wish that England would restore hashish to the Egyptians, that France would double the dose of stupefying drugs smoked in the vertical pipes of North Africa, or in the horizontal ones used by the Annamese. Then, so these cynics say, peace would reign in the Orient. . . .

SPICES

For a long time I have wondered why spices have played such an important part in history; is pepper worth so much bloodshed? Are cinnamon and clove worth the trouble nations have taken to equip their fleets? What recompense can these and other spices give for the tribulations endured by the peoples who have risked their lives in order to bring them from the East?

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Now I hold the clue to this mystery, for research tells me that in olden times the general terms "spices and aromatic ingredients" included not only those condiments which heighten gastronomic pleasures, but the accessories of ancient religious ecstasies and the elements of pharmacopœia as well. Narcotics, ointments, leavens, aperitives, aphrodisiacs, diuretics, anti-intoxicants and purgatives were all imported as "spices" by a Europe unable to produce them for herself.

Nutmeg and ginger supplied the Greeks and Romans with the necessities provided by chemistry in our own age of dyspeptic stomachs, slow hearts and sluggish kidneys; and it would be difficult to understand why battles have been fought for pepper, not really an indispensable condiment, and why those spices which to-day are used only in our stews were once so essential, if one did not know that a mixture of cinnamon powders, nutmeg and clove stimulated the heavy eaters of the past, and that up to the time of Louis XIV spices were sprinkled on all foods and wines.

To-day only the Dutch have not entirely abandoned these old habits. Their kitchen and their table are still all scented with red or black pepper, saffron, nutmeg, organ, pickled mangoes, coriander root, cinnamon, cumic, betel, mace, curry powder, and ginger stalks in jars made of nankeen.

LONDON, THE THRESHOLD TO INDIA

Everywhere in London one is urged to go to the Orient. From Cockspur Street windows the Steamship Companies abruptly force one to notice posters of cities whose very

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names are impregnated with the flavour of curry and spices, and so alluring are their descriptions of these chosen places, the longing of men's dreams through generations, that even those of us saddened by experience into the knowledge that many Eastern cities are like old hags who vainly try to inveigle us by their toothless coquetry and their doddering charms, feel anew the desire to visit them. Bending above the discreetly lit mahogany counters of the Peninsular Line we gaze, fascinated, at words and pictures which seem to glow with a radiance never drawn from England's sun. . . .

And at the other end of the City, when the India docks (once belonging to the old Company) open the great gates which so resemble the doors to the safes of dead and gone noblemen, one may see the steamers tidying themselves between two voyages, much as an actress titivates between two acts of a play. Maltese workmen seem to be massaging them, rubbing them down with essential oils while Chinamen from the East End give them pedicures. Behind them the warehouses rear, outwardly sombre, inwardly stacked with delicate merchandise—bales of silks, cases of tea, crates of fruit. Every day the warehouses are emptied : every day their stocks are replenished by the steamers which bring the East to London's door.

Farther down, at the mouth of the Thames, one may see the fastest steamers of the Indian Ocean which are too large to sail up-river to the City. These very speedy vessels, looking as though they had been dug out of the surrounding chalk, await the hour of departure at Tilbury docks, near the small brick fort chosen by Henry VIII to defend the estuary. Beside this powder magazine

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Queen Elizabeth reviewed her fleet—very small as compared with the Spanish galleons—on the eve of that decisive victory over the Armada, a victory which within a few days and for ever afterwards was to open up for the English the passage to India and all the roads on the globe.

I know nothing more moving than these docklands of London city: from them history speaks as from the Pyramids. From here the first settlers left for Virginia on the great American adventure. In the public-houses, between two brimming tankards, the sailors from the *East Indiamen* sold each other their wives before embarking for Calcutta or Chandernagor. In the old church of the Honourable East India Company, where master mariners are still married, the reading-desks and the pews have been hewn from the masts of the vanquished Armada, and the pulpit is made of a ship's figurehead ripped from the stem-post in a neighbouring dockyard.

But for me there is no need to go so far afield for memories of the East. Since I awakened the Orient has been knocking at the windows of my hotel. . . . Cleopatra's Needle looms up before me. This monument has neither the bright assurance nor the pride of our own obelisk, but rises timidly in a half-gaseous, half-liquid fog, so different from the Egyptian atmosphere where it was born. Cleopatra's Needle gazes down at the red lacquered trams, and the trailers, dragging their reflections after them, are as thickset on the Thames as the *dahabiehs* are lithe on the golden Nile. Poor Cleopatra's Needle! It is like a stage property from *Aida* left forgotten in the deserted wings of an old Opera House. Behind it rises Westminster—the Houses of Parliament which are the envy

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of Cairo. . . . But the Needle remains there, on an eminently Victorian embankment, like a landmark of stone beside the road of centuries, a papyrus of petrified hieroglyphics, an old Oriental sentry emerging from a Syenite quarry. The monument is black with soot, its edges are chipped by frost, its top has been cracked by strokes of lightning.

But I have not finished with Indian London.

In the British Museum the goddess Kali wreathes a wicked snake which poisoned an entire race about her contorted torso. The Hindu students in the Oriental Room are true sons of a Siva, the destructive body with crossed legs and twisted wrists. These students, who have perpetual colds in their heads, are wrapped in shawls, and their large tear-stained eyes peer from behind thick glasses. Knock-kneed, their shins press against baggy grey flannel trousers ; and their faces, the colour of clay soapstone, contrast oddly with their green shirts and their waistcoats of brownish-red tweed.

And the exotic atmosphere of the Museum, unlike any other atmosphere in the world, is carried out into the Bloomsbury streets. Walking about this district one discovers curious second-hand bookshops which, as their catalogues indicate, conceal within their four walls metaphysics and folk-lore from Malabar to the Coromandel. But as well as being bookshops these places are antique shops and laboratories of alchemy. One expects to find on their shelves the mystical signs and numbers used by allegorical English literature, from Milton to Beckford—and one is hardly disappointed. A genuine Ispahan bereft of its border and so full of holes that generations of Armenians would be unable to reconstruct the fine six-

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teenth-century texture, lies next to a copy of the *Upanishads* translated by Max Müller. Lanterns from shattered temples lie helpless beside the heads of broken Buddhas uprooted from their virgin forests, their long hanging ears resembling glands. Standing against the walls are diabolical Thibetan paintings which have become unrolled, and propped against them are some verses from the Koran, a few Saracen shields, and some military medals from the Afghanistan War. . . . Strange little shops which smell of gas and sandalwood, of fog and chutney.

All over London the Orient stretches her tentacles. If one is alone for a moment in the rooms of a big exporter of Chinese goods or period Persian carpets in Camomile Street, or in the establishments of wholesale tea-merchants in Shoe Lane, or in Saint Catherine's dock, one seems to feel the ground moving beneath one's feet. Suddenly one believes that one has left London in some steamship bound for British India. One closes one's eyes. . . . Yes, this is the first hot day in the Red Sea, lunch is called *tiffin* and the punkas and ventilators blow a steady breeze on to the heads below them. Already, on the between-decks, the Mohammedans open their rugs for prayers and perform the ritual of washing their faces with dry hands. Already the Bengalese crew are hanging their ragged clothing (which covered them until Suez was passed) on the deck-rails to dry, and India appears for the first time in their naked torsos which face the magic green light.

If I dwell overmuch on this magic, for which the English have so many tender and melancholy names, it is not because I love the picturesque but because this magic has given fragrance to that Eastern honey which, from vast

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distances, has attracted so many seafaring men, so many younger sons, so many adventurers. All these bees, these active and sentimental ants have, by their united efforts, built the Empire and created its backbone—the road to India.

PART TWO
THE MARITIME ROUTE

MARSEILLES-ORIENT

HAS Asia become a part of our French life by way of democratic Marseilles or of aristocratic Lorient?

Originally it was Marseilles that linked France to the East. Two thousand years before the English, we too had our road to India; we, too—and that a thousand years before the Germans—had our *Drang nach Osten*. How many vessels, from Crusaders' ships to modern steamers, have unloaded their cargoes and scented poisons at Marseilles: the *Arabian Nights*, dear to Galland, Montesquieu's painted Persian boxes, Favart's spangled veils of the sultans, Crébillon's sofas, Van Loo's sequins from odalisks, Jean-Jacques's Armenian cafetans, Virginia's pineapples, the Chinese scenes represented on old Gobelins, the muslins of Ingres's harems, and Baudelaire's hashish.

In the Cannebière Road, I went again to the Hôtel de Noailles—the first stage on the French Imperial road—and I was glad to see the familiar surroundings, the easy chairs of turquoise velvet and the bar among the palm trees, where gilt-edged nineteenth-century Asiatics are welcome. This hotel was frequented by Parsee merchants with vast interests, by opium smokers, Maharajahs, silk merchants from Canton, rubber planters from Indo-China and by officers of the British Indian Army. Harassed by the damp monsoons, pressing both their hands against

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their painful livers, greenish in the face from the nausea that racks them, they await the train for Paris, sitting hunched up in the black and yellow motor-bus with their children's Annamese nurses, their Chinese cooks, their Sepoys and their boys.

They meet, coming from the opposite direction, another group of travellers, returning to Marseilles from Vichy or from Carlsbad, and these new arrivals are relaxed, pink-skinned and clear-eyed. They have reached Marseilles several days before they are to sail. They select their cabins for the return voyage, and from the heights of *Notre Dame de la Garde* they contemplate the Mediterranean over the top of the *Château d'If*. The brigs and other ships of the Levant Company, moored from the Quay by the Old Port, await these travellers. At the Old Port, the Louis XVI houses—the Beauvau mansion, for example, which resisted the construction of the Cannebière Road—and the Napoleon III ornaments, are the last evidence of that vanished age when the people of Marseilles gazed curiously through the ships' small square windows at the nabobs eating their dinners before returning to the Residents' Palaces in Bengal. Then one day the Great War broke out and the Orient, with all the force of a tidal wave, submerged Marseilles and inundated the Occident. . . .

Marseilles, one morning in September 1914. For the past month Zouaves from Tunis, sharp-shooters from Morocco, scouts from Arabia and swaggering soldiers from Senegal have swarmed into the city as Africa flings upon us her dusky flesh to be used as cannon fodder. In the Cannebière Road the Sikhs, with mossy beards, stride past on thin and immensely long legs. They wear

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a flower in the cartridge-case slung across their chests, or in their khaki turbans, and beside them the Marseilles inspectors trot ridiculously, their heads on a level with the Indians' hips.

"They'll make the Kaiser jump!" the vendors of sea-urchins exclaim.

The Mongoloid Gurkhas, carrying frightening, broad-bladed knives in their belts, play a high-pitched tune on their reeds and the crowd cheers them. The city grows more crowded as the weeks go on and in October the first division of Indian cavalry arrive. These men have been shivering on the hilly slopes of Artois, where the strong draught-horses that are white as chalk and resemble the horses of Cheiron, gazed curiously at their dark skins.

The Hindu officers who have come by way of Bombay or Karachi have gone to the Hôtel de Noailles. The *sahibs*—the Rajput princes whose veins are filled with the best blood in India—are the first to land at La Joliette. Watch them now, Jodhpur, Bikanir, Kishenganj, Sungh of Idar, all pressing their faces—so reminiscent of the *Arabian Nights*—against the plate-glass windows of the hotel lobby, and gazing at their men with waggons drawn by white mules, their sacred goats belonging to the Punjab regiments and their ambulances provided by Gwalior or Hyderabad moving past outside. Later on these *sahibs* are destined to take up their quarters in the castles of the Loire, where the Jodhpur cavalry will soon erect their field-ovens made of cow-dung among the vineyards.

Did all these things really happen? Did I come here twenty years ago, or was I bewitched by one of those

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Saracen necromancers who vanish so soon as they are touched? Is life an Aladdin's lamp, continuously being rubbed bright with new wishes but tarnished again almost immediately? This evening, the 8th of February, 1936, the bar of the Hôtel de Noailles is deserted and the travellers I saw earlier in the day are one and all in a hurry. After spending the night here they will leave at once, some by ship, some by rail, some by air from the aerodrome near Martigues made famous by Maurras. This little station has been given the entrancing and very Second Empire name of *Pas-des-Lanciers*. Passengers for Paris who do not wish to go as far as Marseilles can take plane from here, rising from a landscape that is classic and resembles that of the Phœnician outskirts. Here are rocks, cracked by the hot sun, which look as though they had been shattered by dynamite; stunted olive trees, more twisted than is a colonel by dysentery; and clusters of basic slag. Standing in this protected spot the owner of the near-by bastidon has just shot most cruelly some migratory birds.

Among the blossoming almond trees, so hopeful every year only to be betrayed by the brusque return of winter descending from the Ventoux, large charabancs wait for the passengers going to the aerodrome at Marginane. In this little station of *Pas-des-Lanciers*, which is deserted the rest of the day, there are no geraniums, no workshops, no fortresses of compressed fuel-bricks, such as are so proudly displayed by other railway stations. *Pas-des-Lanciers* is really one of the new gateways to the Orient, a fresh starting-point for India. *Air France*, *Air Littoria*, *Luft Hansa*, *K.L.M.*, all of them raise transient visitors to Marseilles from the ground and distribute them instantly to all parts of the world. Marseilles is still, indeed, the

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bridge linking Europe to the Orient, but the city is no longer, as Puvis de Chavannes believed it to be, a door slowly opening to a distant East. . . . To-day the Orient is brutally near: Marseilles-Algiers, Marseilles-Syria, Marseilles-Casa, Marseilles-Tunis, Marseilles-Brindisi, Marseilles-Alexandria, none of these journeys takes more than a few hours.

"You have a new clientèle," I told the manager of the hotel. "A clientèle of the future."

He shook his head sadly. "One cannot be sure of anything these days," he replied. "The hotel business is like politics; it depends on the aeroplanes' schedule—and that changes daily. In the summer nowadays Marseilles is only a port of call where planes stop each morning. The English go on to spend the night in Rome; the Germans in Spain; and the Dutch fly at a stretch from Amsterdam to Athens or Alexandria."

The Mediterranean is smaller than we thought: the speed of our age drinks it up with an overwhelming thirst and soon the road to India will be like a little lane in a country parish!

MALTA

THIS morning, on awakening, I went up on the bridge. The moon, which had been late in retiring, was just disappearing, taking with it the last tatters of the night. On our starboard side was the rocky island of Gozo, the first stone in the Maltese Archipelago, and as dawn came up I saw the first faint outline of Malta behind its bay.

"What a beautiful sky," I said to the officer on duty. "Already one can see the African light, and yet one is still conscious of the freshness of our European winter." Then I asked him in which direction Sicily lay.

He gave me his heavy binoculars, and through them I saw a striking pyramid suddenly detach itself from the blue . . . Etna. Below it, resting on a straight though foggy base, Sicily spread her coastline for me from Syracuse to Messina.

I turned towards Malta, that rocky lair where the surviving wild animals of Europe, driven on by the ice, are ending their wandering existence in the tepid atmosphere of a milder climate. The seagulls, their white rigging spread out, were drifting along; they and their plaintive cry moved through a sky in which here and there long filaments of soft substance, too lazy to join the clouds, were trailing dreamily. The rocky walls of Malta and her dorsal ridge, crowned with look-out towers, stood out

MALTA

crudely and coldly from the surrounding sweetness. There was hardly a shadow cast on those volcanic breaks in the rocks filled with rain-water, where few plants have managed to survive. Small towns, rising in tiers above the port of Valetta, were crowned with Jesuit churches and sloping fortifications.

Churches and fortresses, military defence and faith, that is Malta. Despite this fact, Gobineau saw nothing there but "operatic rocks, awaiting the appearance of a tenor singing a cavatine", and Byron wrote an impertinent barcarolle about the island :

Adieu, ye cursed streets of stairs . . .
Adieu red coats and redder faces.

Neither of them felt the tragic sunniness of this island whose destiny has been too great for her.

Once a Phœnician colony the island bears strong traces of its ancestry. The Maltese are by race Phœnicians and their language is Phœnician. (The English claim that eighty per cent of the Maltese do not even understand Italian.) The island is situated at an almost equal distance from Africa and Europe on the north to south equatorial line, from Gibraltar and Port Said on the east to west Equator. Malta's strategic position was once formidable : the island experienced every invader. The towns and villages have Greek, Arabian, French, Italian, Spanish and English names, and in common with the high seas, the island is familiar with all sorts of boats : from the gondola with canopies and *feluccas* to little boats named after saints and fishing smacks, ornamented at the stem-post, like Chinese junks, with painted eyes.

MALTA

himself in the famous siege which saved the island, the very ramparts of Christianity, from the Mohammedan onslaught. La Valette knew the Turks; he had served for one year as a slave on the galley belonging to Dragut, the Algerian; and later he defeated his former enemy when he was commanding the Sultan's squadron which was besieging Malta. After this victory, he built the fortress of *La Valette*, which all Europe used as a model.

Two centuries passed. The Knights lost their warlike virtues; the Order degenerated. Bonaparte, on his way to Egypt, took possession of the island, then lost it again, and the English reinstated the Knights of Malta, who had ousted Rome. But already the Admiralty understood Malta's strategic importance. Rather than give up the island which they had pledged themselves to evacuate by the Treaty of Amiens, the English violated the Treaty. On the chief gateway in the wall surrounding the island they affixed a tablet commemorating the date on which they had arrived, "summoned by the voice of Europe and the love of Malta". Then they settled down on this island at the extreme end of Europe, whence they could see the narrow channel separating white, free men from the dark-skinned and enslaved races.

Again I looked through the binoculars at the large white triangle of the volcano. Etna and Malta, Italy and England, were face to face. With a silent eloquence, which made the light seem dimmer, our present problems rose before me. One cannot avoid being anxious when one sees the massive armour that makes the island resemble a vigilant knight. It is impossible to escape troubled thoughts in the presence of watchful battlements, which, by a terrible reversal of circumstances, to-day conceal guns

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directed not towards the east, towards Islam, but towards the north. These guns are like a revolver which the white races intend to hold up against their own foreheads. Will the aerals above the Admiralty in London one day receive a fatal and suicidal command from this island which will shatter peace? I do not think so. Malta, this English fortress, is only a quarter of an hour by aeroplane from the Italian coast and what was once Malta's strength is now her weakness. Italy is watching her closely. The small town of Pantelleria, between Sicily and Tunis, was quite unimportant a few months ago, but to-day it is an Italian fortress. This winter the *Daily Telegraph* was the first newspaper to announce this fact with a cry of alarm. The creeks and coves of Malta could not shelter a modern fleet: they could not offer sufficient security. England was already searching for another base in the Western Mediterranean, perhaps in the Balearic Islands. . . .

This morning, the lower town is a clear buff colour in the south-eastern light and the bluish town above seems to retain something of the fierce caresses of its sleeping inhabitants. The salient angles of the stronghold dominate a bare and avaricious landscape, which seems very old, as old as the earth itself, and the terraces and wrinkles of the soil are like the furrows on a troubled brow. Only the Cathedral of St. John rises slowly above the ramparts as we approach. The Palace of the Grand Masters sinks down behind the sentries' road round the castle.

Malta separates the Mediterranean into two basins. Under the converging searchlights from Tripoli and Syracuse, under the fires of Bizerta and the signals from Etna, the eternal lighthouse, Malta announces that the traveller

MALTA

is entering a second inland sea. The island proclaims that the Orient is now raising the curtain on her grand opera, that the candles are being lit in a theatre filled with philosophies and marionettes, eternal religions and gods with animals' heads.

VENICE

THERE was a time before the War when only small steamers travelling from Trieste to Ragusa anchored before Saint George the Greater. The two pillars of the Piazzetta seemed enormous because no gigantic ship dwarfed them by comparison; no companion ladder made them look like mere candlesticks. That was about 1908. The two red porphyry casement windows of the Basilican Church of St. Mark were the sole reminders of a past which had known both Oriental and military splendour. Indeed, in order to recall the fall of Constantinople or the victory of Lepanto it was necessary to climb up to the gallery of the Doge's Palace where the pictures of these battles were hung and even when one studied these it was difficult to keep one's glance from straying to the peaceful view of the two little steamers, Chioggia and Torcello and a few fishing smacks which could be seen from the balcony window.

To-day, from this same window, smoke is seen rising from the naval dockyards behind the Giardini; aeroplanes arrive hourly from Barcelona or Munich, from Brindisi or Marseilles, and land beside a squadron of fighting planes. The Evangelists' lion is painted on their wings, and huge flying-boats from Egypt and India are moored in front of the statue of Fortune turning lightly on its gilded globe.

VENICE

During the last decade Italian ships have been the best to Bombay, the fastest to Alexandria. More recently, the Germans, imitating the Italians, have made faster ships. Other navies are following this example ; vessels on their way to India now travel at a speed of from fourteen to twenty knots. Venice gave the impetus to greater speed. When she resumed her connections with the Levant, she was reviving a tradition which was a thousand years old.

“Europe is the head of the Universe,” says an old Venetian proverb, “Italy is the head of Europe, and Venice the eye of Italy.” With this eye the horned Doge, at the close of the fifteenth century, watched over his Empire. The vanquished passed in precession before him : slaves from the South, terrorised Saracens, his Egyptian allies, subjected peoples from Asia and from Africa. The Dyaks of Borneo and the Sultan of Zanzibar wanted only the Doge’s splendour and his medals ; their ducats of gold were at a premium. To-day, in the oldest tomb in Sarawak there are glass beads from Murano and Venetian mirrors wreathed in tarnished silver-foil, in the mildewed surfaces of which the Oriental beauty of the harem, accustomed until then to metal mirrors, saw her own lovely face clearly for the first time.

After A.D. 452, when the Venetians fled from the Barbarians and hid in the Torcello marshes, miracles were accomplished. The domination of the Adriatic was wrested from Ravenna, the Huns’ advance was stopped, the Normans were held in check in Sicily. Then followed the first Crusade, with the opportunity of acquiring the Phœnician heritage of Tyre, and the fourth, directed against Byzantium’s navy rather than against the Infidels. This made it possible for the Venetians to sweep across

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the Oriental Mediterranean and capture Rhodes and Dalmatia as a naval base. Towards the end of the thirteenth century the Genoese were driven out of the Levant ; Cyprus was ceded by the Turks ; finally, the *Statuts Nautiques* of 1172 became law throughout the civilised world which had heretofore accepted the maritime code of Byzantium.

Venice organised the greatest slave trade ever known to man, and sold without discrimination Tatars, Bulgarians, or Russians to Egypt, and Ethiopians to Europe. Marco Polo established connections with China. From the fifth to the fifteenth century the population of the Serene City rose from two hundred to two hundred thousand. About a thousand patrician millionaires, representing the largest fortunes of the Age, lived in the Gothic palaces on the Grand Canal, decorated with serpentine discs and Asiatic porphyries. In the commercial ports of the Levant, merchants were faced with Venetian monopolies.

The achievements of Venice were made possible because her fleet was unique in world history. She controlled three thousand naval units and thirty-eight thousand sailors. In 1122 the city sent out, at one time, three hundred ships against Egypt. Feluccas, galleons, brigantines, galleys and triremes sailed the Adriatic ; this was a direct heritage from Rome by way of Byzantium. Venice began to be aware of her importance. She was the port of Central Europe ; she re-exported spices and silk to the Holy Roman Empire and to Flanders. Under Charlemagne, the Court officials were clad exclusively in Dalmatian and Byzantine coats supplied by Venice. Galleys from England, from Barbary, from Beyrouth, from Alexandria and Aigues-Mortes anchored in the muddy sea

VENICE

where the white ships of the Lloyd Triestino are moored to-day.

Suddenly, in 1498, the Doge summoned his stupefied Council of Ten, and read to them a dispatch from the Venetian Ambassador in Lisbon: the Portuguese had sent thirteen caravans to India by a new route, round the east coast of Africa. Lorenzo Bernardo, the Venetian Ambassador at the Sultan's court, confirmed this report. When Vasco da Gama discovered a better and safer route to Calcutta or Ormuz by way of the Cape of Good Hope, he made it immediately possible for Western Europe to dominate the route to India. That is to say, Western Europe captured the wealth and the privilege which had belonged to Eastern Europe. Eastern Europe, on the other hand, was deprived of the tremendous commercial advantages she had bought for six hundred years with her gold and her blood. Exhausted by her conflicts with Genoa and conquered by the Turks, Venice then declined until 1797, when Bonaparte found the city a decayed mummy.

Venice tried unsuccessfully to rouse the Sultan of Egypt; these developments were as disastrous for him as they were for herself. She made a vain effort to influence the Pope, to stir up the Turks, to help the people of Marseilles. In brief, her attempts to win the support of the Oriental Mediterranean were futile; she gave Spain galleons with which to crush England, but this gift was useless, and Venice felt that soon England would succeed Portugal. The Republic's great days were over, and for almost four hundred years the Atlantic triumphed over the Mediterranean as far as the route to India was concerned.

In 1869, when the Suez Canal was opened and the Levant

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again became important, speed was to dominate the seas, and Brindisi, Naples and Marseilles were the important ports on the route to India. Forgetting that Venice was for so many years the Orient's Ambassador in Europe, the world saw in her only an old and sleepy town, which was not reawakened until Mussolini appeared in 1922.

ALEXANDRIA

AT dawn we came upon a patrol of British submarines commanded by the large *Porpoise*. Indifferent to the substance which supports and envelops the hulls of other ships, the substance which is called the surface of the sea, these submarines are not, like other vessels, at the mercy of the waves. An hour later, torpedo boats passed us; yesterday a flotilla from Gibraltar accompanied us all day at twenty-two knots. From Cyprus to Egypt the Eastern Mediterranean is furrowed by little groups of armed sentries who guard the Levant and her commercial ports.

The English do not, of course, love work for its own sake, but when they work, they roll up their sleeves and forget twenty or thirty years of laziness. Alexandria proves this fact. For six months, on land as well as at sea, they have made so many changes, they have built so many defences and fortifications, that the city, more hard-working than belligerent, no longer recognises itself. That is because since October 1935, the axis for the protection of the route to India has moved. This axis is no longer in a direct line through Gibraltar, Malta and Port Said. A triangle has developed, a warlike formation. At sea, the triangle is Alexandria, Cyprus, Haifa; on land it is: Marsa Matruh, Alexandria and the Canal. Alexandria is the point common to both triangles, and for this reason the city is the crucial factor in present political developments.

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Perhaps there is an Egyptian problem in Cairo, but there is none in Alexandria. In Cairo the Foreign Office is in control, but in Alexandria the Admiralty has the last word.

During the Great War the Admiralty captured and secured the freedom of the seas. At the Peace, the Admiralty successfully claimed possession of the German Fleet. In 1931, when the sailors were dissatisfied with the reduction in their pay, the Admiralty said : " It is better to let the gold standard perish," and the pound sterling fell.

From the Admiralty's point of view, the last quarter of 1935 was like the end of a lease. The Home Fleet, old furniture which was in the way, was sent from one end of the Mediterranean to the other in search of an appropriate repository. Extraordinary as this may seem, the best natural ports do not belong to England : Bizerta is French, Minorca is Spanish, the port of Sude is Greek. After much meandering, the Home Fleet came to rest at Alexandria. That is why the English sent not diplomats but technical experts to the recent Anglo-Egyptian discussions. In a great naval country, the Admiralty should, quite naturally, be the first to speak.

" What were these Anglo-Egyptian conversations about ? "

" A tea-party on board the *Queen Elizabeth*," an Englishman of the Intelligence Service told me this winter.

You will find only two large rivers in the Mediterranean : the Nile and the Rhone. The latter accumulates and hardens much material at her mouth. The Nile, on the other hand, the river which has created Egypt, destroys her own ports. Rosetta and Damietta and other towns have tried to stabilise the moving sands. Port Said, which owes its birth to the Suez Canal, was created by continuous

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dredging. Alexandria is on firmer natural ground because the city is outside the zone which must be artificially protected against the mud from the Nile. That is why, this morning, when we entered the harbour, I saw the Home Fleet, England's bodyguard, protecting the route to India.

I have grown accustomed to peaceful scenes and this spectacle was like a bad dream; had the eighteen years since the Armistice passed so quickly? In an instant, those years were forgotten as I stared at this world of iron, fire and black smoke, a world in which the decks were cleared, and everyone was ready to act. Memories rose from the misty past, and pictures in war books, beginning to turn yellow at the edges, marched towards me. These were the same ships I had known in the past, for naval construction is expensive and the post-war world needed money for other things. The *Renown*, youngest of these huge floating fortresses, was built in 1923 and the *Queen Elizabeth*, the flag-ship, in 1913. The dear *Queen Elizabeth*! I recognised her familiar silhouette, her tripod mast with the gigantic projector blinking atop it like an eye. I recognised too her white admiral's flag with the red cross which announces to the world that the master of the fleet is on board. The flag-ship was not generally lying idle in Alexandria harbour at this time of year, nor was she even resting in her own base at Malta. Usually, at this season, she was in our port of Villefranche for the carnival, moored for a couple of months in front of the Hôtel Bienvenu where I slept peaceably until awakened at eight each morning by the music from her band—and what music it was. Then the Prefect of the Alpes-Maritimes would step on board and the guns echoed in the hills behind the quiet town. The bars along the quaysides

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had increased their staffs and engaged pretty maids from Nice to attract the English sailors who came ashore in their pinnaces, their arms crossed, standing like lackeys behind old-fashioned coaches. The languid population admired this sight tremendously, and even the Customs House officers, noting the sailors' spick-and-span uniforms, brushed their caps and straightened their shoulders, while a Maltese boat rigged up like a gondola took the Admiral ashore to his luncheon at Cannes. Happy were those days when naval conflicts were confined to the harbour and armaments consisted of lovely eyes and a few playful slaps on the cheek. This year the harbour of Villefranche lay deserted, an air of melancholy hanging above her as though she mourned the loss of the *Queen Elizabeth* even as that great ship longed for the resinous odour of the bowed pine trees on Cap Ferrat. . . .

I was brought back to the present by the muttered grumble of our Captain, "Since the English came to Alexandria it is always foggy when the wind is in the south."

It seemed to me that the canopy of smoke which enveloped Alexandria was so heavy that no wind could hope to move it. Smoke rose from all the warships because the entire fleet was under steam and our steamer was forced to grope her way in semi-darkness, interrupted here and there by a ray of dim light from a discoloured sun, through a network of funnels, masts and turrets.

When I first came here, four years ago, this free and open port spreading along the fringes of the desert was crowded with passenger steamers and cargo vessels. The *dahabiehs*, in groups of five or six, all towed by the one tug, left the fresh-water canals and stopped alongside the big trading ships. Then the snowy bales of cotton were

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unloaded, while an occasional gunboat flying the Egyptian flag, the only spot of green in this expanse of pale water, searched for buoys to which some smuggler might have attached a small bag of opium or hashish. Alexandria's drug traffic was still as extensive as it had been in the days of Alexander the Great !

But now all was changed. The port had been militarised and the passenger steamers were anchored in the outer mole, where formerly the Arabs confined Christian merchant-ships, those rare cargo-boats which braved the many changes of modernity and the fixing of quotas in order to pursue their trade. In a far corner of the harbour lay some rusty old Greek steamers, the existence of which had obviously been forgotten, for they were as out of date as the cargoes they had once transported. There was also a Nazi ship unloading beef, and a vessel from Soviet Russia. The outer mole, however, was not worth the seeing : the real spectacle of Alexandria lay facing us.

We entered the harbour through a straight iron boom. The centre folded back like a door, and closed itself again within a few seconds of our passing. At Haifa, so they told me, a thick chain is being laid across the port, like that which protected the port of Marseilles in the Middle Ages and was removed by the Aragonese, who placed it in the Cathedral at Valencia as a trophy. Hitler was right when he said that Europe was returning to mediæval times ! Here we were closing our ports with chains and keeping urban districts under lock and key during the night hours. . . . The face of the world is indeed changed from the face some of us can remember gazing upon in 1900 ; it is veiled to-day by mystical and half-understood truths.

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They had erected batteries along the desert which ends in the sea at Alexandria, in front of the Mex Hospital and round the borders of a palm-grove. Aeroplane hangars decorated Marsah-el-Kana and Djella. English Tommies were at work among sacks of sand and strands of barbed-wire, some of them digging, others busy unloading lorries. The scene was reminiscent of the Tommies at Etaples, and of tents in the sand, under a grey sky . . . wasn't I back near Boulogne in 1915?

As the sun finally broke through the mist I noticed that even Bonaparte's old fortifications had been repaired, and as we glided along under the smoke and steam into the clearance between the lines of the great fleet pale gleams of light struck back from the armour-plating. Everything in the harbour was carefully adjusted, well-balanced, tidy. No room was wasted; in the centre a narrow passage had been left for steamers and a short straight space for the taking-off of hydroplanes. Two aircraft carriers, flying the Admiral's colours, were in sight and on their decks, swept clean as though by a tornado, showed the skeletons of lift-shafts. These carriers listed towards the sea at an angle surprising to those spectators accustomed to seeing vessels list towards the bow. Small fighter planes dropped from the sky, performed aerobatics, shot upwards again with astonishing force. Everything in the harbour appeared hard and rigid except the water, the graceful flag signals and the gulls. Everything seemed vulcanised; from all sides came the sounds of hammering on steel bulkheads, and Alexandria itself was like a huge smoking furnace.

Day and night the aeroplanes moved through the sky, alone or in groups. They did not come from our debonair base at Fejus; they were not the innocent air patrols which

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used to hum above Monaco once a week ; rather did they give one the impression of guardians that were frighteningly efficient and vigilant in their determination to protect the ships above which they soared.

A strange sight in the afternoon sunlight, a line of those silver sentinels suddenly wheeling about and moving northwards until they merged into one distant object rather like the shining stern of a warship. For long after they had vanished I stood at gaze, watching the leaden smoke-clouds creep across the sky and the beauty of the day change to a grey storminess reflected by the dun-coloured ships beneath it. Soon it would be night, and the brilliant searchlights would strive to probe the secrets of the city. . . . Truly, I thought, here in Alexandria England was defending the vital centre of her road to India with all the mighty forces at her command.

Behind the docks I found that this ancient Greek and Jewish city was more affected by modern crises than it had been when I last saw it in 1932. Now the city is made beautiful by a model Italian school with fine new buildings, and at the New Port (which is really the old one renamed) towering houses surround a huge basin of light, water and freshness. The high buildings make the port seem American and the asphalt roads, polished by the hooves of horses and bordered by plummy palm-trees, remind one of Rio. But behind the Antoniades Park, where the Mahmoudieh Canal crawls sleepily, the city is part of eternal Egypt. All the wealth of a mighty country, all the cotton crops moving towards the market and the port of Alexandria, are transported by this canal, which is no larger than the Saint Martin or the Brenta. The cotton

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is shipped down the Nile from the Sudan in great square bales which are piled on top of grain sacks—a custom which always reminds me of the Mississippi and of the sharp decline in cotton prices which almost ruined Egypt for the second time. Here, too, as well as on that remote Western river, the snowy bales are handled by black men. The *dahabiehs*, lying so low in the water that their decks are on a level with its surface, glide under the thick, arching ficus plants and are drawn by half-naked boatmen, whose mournful advance is made by a series of jerks since they are tied to their masts by long ropes. Beyond Aboukir and Rosetta, the latter once a port of Alexandria, the city extends to the banks of the Nile, and poor Rosetta is now merely a distant suburb, the minarets of which loom up behind the chimneys of the workshops where rice is husked. Against the flat, black earthen plain the crescent-shaped sails of the *dahabiehs*, which appear to be scratching the sky; the soft fur on the necks of camels; the colza plants and the ripening grain are the only bright objects despite the strength of the sun.

One is reminded everywhere of the Bible. Every shepherd, every lamb, every mule is a Biblical creature. The animals are thinner than they were, but they seem to be happier than animals in other parts of our modern world, perhaps because if they are badly treated it is with the ill-usage meted out by uncivilised men to their fellow-beings, and blows from Oriental whips are less humiliating than the electric cramming practised on Argentine or New Zealand farms. Egypt has contributed to agricultural progress with her banana plantations and her early vegetables; but apart from these things she is still the Egypt of the Ptolemies and the Pharaohs, a land of eternal gestures.

FROM ABUSIR TO MARSA MATRUH

NOW that Alexandria has become the strongest armed fort of the Mediterranean, equal in every way to Gibraltar, it has been necessary to rivet her solidly to the ground by means of two great encampments. One of these nails has been hammered down at Abusir ; the other at Marsa Matruh in the desert. Thus England has an air force on her right, an army on her left, and her fleet in the centre of Egypt.

The beach at Abusir is furrowed by drag-nets covered with Delta mud which are pulled along by trawlers ; consequently greasy black marks run diagonally across the sand and add to the scene of desolation. Abusir is not a good aviation ground, being too exposed and also being divided into two sections by a railway track. This railway, used to transport goods and to convey visitors to the watering-place, connects Abusir with Alexandria. Two-seater fighting planes and machine-guns, visible among the fifteen wooden hangars and the same number of canvas shelters that have sprung up during recent months, face the northern winds. The hydroplanes rest in the narrow inlet near the Napoleonic forts, but their position is not sufficiently protected and they rock uneasily on waves which are the colour of old machine-oil. The sleepy old beach, like

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the one at Trouville, extends between two slumbering camps and ends in rows of palm-trees, under which the date-leaves cast queer shadows shaped like star-fish.

At Marsa Matruh the youth of Alexandria had scarcely discovered its blue bay, its white sand, its almost violent contrast between the cold water and the intense heat of the desert, when the Dutch Mediterranean planes, in order to remain close to the coast as long as possible, chose this beach as their last stop on the journey from Africa.

Suddenly this small town became a forbidden zone. The British General Headquarters were troubled by the concentration of Italian troops in Libya and in the brief course of one winter had fortified the coast—the only vulnerable coast in Egypt. Very soon now a strategic railway will connect this strip of desert with Alexandria. Its construction is going on apace behind a hedge of barbed-wire flanked by machine-guns which advance like a Roman rostrum. Marsa Matruh is two hundred miles from the Libyan frontier, but the English prefer to leave a broad glacier of sand between themselves and Balbo's Italians; so they have established their base near the only spring in this region, and people bustle about busily where this water gushes forth. The labourers, most of whom are Italians employed by the British Command, have made cement dug-outs and trenches for telephones. Curiously enough, while they were digging they came upon old Roman fortifications, and only recently some sappers found a system of pipes laid down by Cæsar's legionaries when the Libyan and Cyrenaica deserts were irrigated and very fertile, and when Cleopatra bathed there.

To-day Marsa Matruh—no less than the edge of the desert at Alexandria—is reminiscent of Boulogne in 1915;

FROM ABUSIR TO MARSA MATRUH

behind the dunes lurk ambulances, canteens and field batteries. In Egypt, however, the dunes are monochrome and arid, even alfalfa being unable to grow upon them, and the winter sky does not reflect the drifting, rose-lined greyness of the river Canche : by day the sky is changed only by sandstorms and at night by the searchlights.

An entirely warlike scene : only the presence of the enemy is missing. . . .

THE LOWER NILE

JOINVILLE writes :

The river which flows through the land of Egypt comes from an earthly Paradise where ginger, rhubarb, cloves and other good things abound, and while she streams lazily along she stretches out her tributaries here and there into the countryside until she reaches Saint Remy, when she seems to become stronger, more aware of her vast importance, and separates herself into seven great branches which inundate the plains. Nobody knows why the Nile does this, but everybody regards her action as a blessing from God ; for if the river does not overflow no good can come to the land of Egypt since she is so close to the rising sun that intense heat prevails and rains are rare and not nearly heavy enough. Indeed, towards evening confusion prevails by the river, because all the natives come down to her banks to fetch their drinking water.

The “ seven branches of the Nile ”, described by Joinville, have been reduced to two tributaries. Between Damietta and Rosetta the river works like a madwoman to raise the level of her course, and her extraordinary efforts can be observed only from the sky. The journey by air from Abusir to Port Said over the strange, spreading pyramid of the Nile Delta takes almost an hour. At first the Mediterranean, at this point more like a muddy river

THE LOWER NILE

than a sea, lies beneath ; then comes an enormous lagoon shaped like a cat's tongue ; finally, the marshy kingdom of the Delta, so disgusting in colour and in form, reveals itself in all its hideousness, forcing the observer to think of every horrible simile he can. For the Delta is like spots of saltpetre on an ancient wall, a scab on an old wound, an old mirror cracked by dampness, a mushroom-bed, oysters seen through a microscope. . . . Misty clouds drifting up from the sea are frayed like the smoke rising from a cigarette held by a dreamy smoker lying on a couch, and they linger for a moment under the plane before they are absorbed by the hot desert air. Huge bubbles appear on the surface of the marshland, as though some prehistoric monster was breathing in the mud beneath. Mire has been flowing from this enormous mass of filth since the world began ; but always the marsh has tried to settle like cream on milk, to warm itself to dryness under the sun's glare, and occasionally it has succeeded, for example when the early Egyptian villages were built on newly furrowed soil where the moisture was held in check.

But the aeroplane is rising and the marsh now appears to be sprinkled with small heaps of mice-droppings. The sun has made great cracks in the clay on which fishing-nets are drying, and on the broad expanse reaching as far as the horizon the brownish islands remind one of bristling hedgehogs. The rough outline of a point of land emerges from this chaos and then sinks back again into the water. This is the kingdom of mosquitoes and aquatic birds from Siberia and Tanganyika, but it seems empty of signs of human occupation save for a few derelict huts which have given up the struggle to remain upright, while from its

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shores one or two boats, their sails transformed into shells by the wind, move away as though in disgust.

The aeroplane dips down again to the point at which the Delta divides itself into long strips not unlike fingers and here, incredible though it may seem, firm earth has defeated squelching marsh and stagnant water. Staring down from the plane one feels that the dark and blessed hand of Fate has changed desert to oasis, for against the rich black soil of the Delta fingers rises a chessboard pattern of alfalfa, cotton, clover and banana trees. Through the waterways people travel by barque as the sons of the Pharaohs travelled centuries ago. In olden times the masts of these barques were V-shaped and the sails square; to-day the sails are Latin, pointed at the end and trailing along in the water like quill pens being dipped into an inkpot, while the oarsmen remain standing like gondoliers in front of the *chadoufs*, the hydraulic balancers.

But now we leave the Nile, that vast river slightly longer than the Mississippi, whose life is all crowded into a distance of about four thousand miles, and below us shimmer a series of rose and lilac-blue pools. A luminous haze drifts slowly from the heights of the Abyssinian plateau, tries vainly to absorb itself in the burning air, hangs dully around our plane. Only when the weather is favourable and there is a fresh north-easterly breeze, do the dregs of this mist move gently towards the Suez Canal and even then Port Said, stretching forth a high stone arm, prevents them from reaching their goal.

PART THREE
THE MARITIME ROUTE
(continued)
THE SUEZ CANAL

THE SUEZ CANAL THROUGH THE CENTURIES

GEOLGY has preserved traces of an age when the Red Sea and the Mediterranean were one. They were separated only by a long promontory, all that existed of Egypt, but a gradual rise of the earth's surface caused first Upper Egypt and then, slowly, the Isthmus of Suez to appear. Lower Egypt and the Delta did not emerge for a considerable period afterwards, but by the time of Herodotus these lands were in being and were regarded by the people as a gift from her alluvial deposits made by the Nile to the Mediterranean sea. Then the Isthmus, rising by degrees from the waves, pushed the Red Sea towards the south, thus dividing it completely from the Mediterranean.

Now the threshold of history had been reached. Man, learning how to navigate, began to use maritime routes and suddenly this Isthmus, which had thrust itself so inconveniently between the two seas, became an obstacle to commerce. The idea of removing this barrier was thus a problem born of the growth of civilisation.

A bas-relief at the Temple of Karnak shows the Pharaoh, Seti I, returning from the wars in his chariot drawn by steeds who toss feathered ornaments on their heads ; while on the other side of a frieze decorated by a chequered

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pattern of fish, his subjects welcome and acclaim him with music. According to an inscription this dark strip of frieze is called a *division* and represents the Suez Canal at the time of the Pharaohs, one thousand and three hundred years before the birth of Christ, and three thousand, one hundred and sixty-eight years before the birth of Monsieur de Lesseps.

The old *division* was not a straight line from north to south as it is to-day. In ancient times it was generally—although wrongly—believed that the level of the Red Sea was some twenty-seven feet higher than that of the Mediterranean, and this opinion persisted, in certain quarters, until the middle of the nineteenth century. The Egyptians were therefore terrified that, if they built a canal connecting the two seas, a torrent of water would flood their country. Besides, the Canal of the Pharaohs began near Bubaste, on the Nile, and they planned to end it at the city of Heroopolis, in the Isthmus, from which place goods could be transported up-river.

The work of Seti I, continued by Sesostris, his son, and then by Necos, was finally completed by Darius, the Persian, who became the master of Egypt. Herodotus saw the Canal when it was navigable. It took eight centuries to finish; and during the reign of Necos the lives of one hundred and twenty thousand workmen were lost in the course of the excavations. Ptolemy II lengthened the Canal to the sea, warding off the dangerous possibility, which was at first imaginary, that the sea might burst the primitive wooden sluice gates.

The Canal was navigable only for a few months each year, during the season when the Nile overflowed: Cleopatra, running away from Octavius after the Battle of

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Actium, found the river was so low that her fleet had to be carried across the Isthmus.

During the following centuries Egypt declined, and the Canal was forgotten, so that it gradually silted up until Trajan made it navigable once more. Merchandise arriving from India by way of the Red Sea, (Strabo records that he saw more than a hundred vessels), was transported by canal as far as Coptos, and then taken down the river. At Alexandria goods were loaded on to the great fleet and shipped to Rome.

After the age of the Antonines, the Canal silted up again. It was not dug out afresh as far as Kolzum (Clysma, now Suez) until 640 when the Caliph Omar wanted to ship Egyptian grain to Arabia, so that the food supply of Medina and Mecca would be assured.

Mecca and Medina, the two cities for the sake of which the Prince of the True Believers, as he was called, reopened the Canal, were also responsible for the closing of this watercourse. To starve out these cities, Abbasside El Mausur stopped up the Canal at Kolzum. The Canal died : it had been alive for twelve hundred years, and had to wait eleven hundred years for its resurrection. The Red Sea receded, leaving the ancient gulf of Heroopolite, which had become the Bitter Lakes, a prisoner in the sands, providing the last remaining evidence of the Sea's former vastness.

Thus, up to the Middle Ages, the waterway to India was a purely technical problem of national and commercial interest, and dependent only upon the goodwill, the intelligence or the financial situation of Egypt's masters. But in modern times the situation changed. The Isthmus became a serious international issue affecting all the great

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powers, and the most amazing intrigues were centred round it.

Carelessness and a lack of initiative were not the only reasons why Islam tried to barricade one of the great roads to world progress ; this road, it must be remembered, led directly to Jiddah, the port of Mecca and Medina, the holy cities. The Mohammedan soul rose in disgust and horror at the thought that unbelievers might approach Mohammed's tomb.

We do not want [one Turkish decree proclaimed] foreign nations, these daughters of sin, to come near the sea at Suez, for the glorious pilgrimage to Mecca follows this route ; if we allowed navigation on it, we should be betraying our religion, our sovereign and all of Islam.

As this decree indicates, the Sublime Port was never inclined to reopen the Canal for the possible benefit of these hated foreign fleets.

The Mediterranean world then began to resemble a huge arena, wherein Christians battled with infidels for supremacy. Christians tried to forge a trail to India despite the obstacles placed in their way by the Mohammedans. The sons of the prophet were obsessed by fear that the Christians, this " crafty and enterprising sect ", might settle somewhere in their vast Empire, but at the same time they also appreciated the possible profits to be derived at the customs gates of powerful Turkey from the trade of these foreign dogs. The Mussulmen were therefore torn between their wish to prevent Europeans from defiling their territories, and their desire for a share in the splendid profits accruing from the Western trade with India. The shortest trade route was by way of Egypt and the Isthmus and the

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French seem to have been the first to understand this fact. Twice a year Lyons and Marseilles sailed to the port of Alexandria and fetched products from India and Arabia. Some of these imports were being unloaded at Marseilles, and sold in France and Spain ; the rest were shipped up the Rhone and the Saône to be distributed in Germany from the Rhine and the Moselle.

Charles of Anjou, King of Naples, intrigued against his brother, Saint Louis, and transferred the Crusade, originally planned to be directed against Egypt, to Tunis, because he wanted to safeguard his Marseilles subjects' commercial relations with the Sultan of Egypt. France's policy of reconciliation with Turkey, for which Francis I is so often reproached, was prompted by a desire to obtain Conventions from Soliman the Magnificent, which would secure for France favourable and secure methods of trading.

SAGRES, OR A NEW ROUTE TO INDIA FROM THE ATLANTIC

ONE day, in a little corner of Algave, the curve of world destiny was deflected. Algave is a fortified village perched on a flat rock between the bay of Sagres and the headland of Atalaya in Portugal. A postern-gate and an arched passage give access to a large, heart-shaped square surrounded by old houses inhabited by the employees of the signal-station and the lighthouse. One of these houses, on the right-hand side of the square, is said to have been the residence of Henry, called the Navigator, fifth son of the great King John I of Portugal and of an English princess.

In 1426 Henry the Navigator brought back from Venice a map of the world and a manuscript in which Marco Polo, one hundred and thirty years before, had described his voyage from the Khan's Tartarian country to Ceylon and Coromandel. From these papers, and from data he had already collected through his own experiences, Prince Henry formulated his plan. He knew that since the Arabian domination had barred the Red Sea to the Christians it had grown tired of directing the fate of Empires and had retired to sleep on a divan in Egypt; but he was too astute a man to suppose that the sleeper had both eyes tightly closed. Therefore he conceived the idea of

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avoiding the Arabian obstacle in Egypt by sailing round Abyssinia and South Africa. This route, he reasoned, would save the enormous taxes paid to the Sultan's customs houses, the expense of reloading cargo carried across the sands of the Isthmus, and the money wasted in transport of goods from Alexandria to Europe in Venetian ships.

So the genius of one man and the will of a small people mapped out a new route to India.

But this idea of genius was not prompted by intuition alone. Henry the Navigator also remembered an ancient tradition, according to which ships could travel to India by sea without leaving the Atlantic Ocean. Herodotus had been the first to mention the journey of a Phoenician round Africa ; six thousand years before the birth of Christ a King of Egypt had sent out an explorer to investigate this route and he had sailed from Gibraltar and returned by way of Libya ; the Greeks, while professing to doubt the truth of this adventure, had shown certain signs of awed belief, and the Carthaginians on the west coast of Africa had openly believed the tale. Henry the Navigator was familiar with the works of Herodotus, Ptolemy and Strabo, and he knew that Eudoxos of Cyzicus, who attempted this extraordinary voyage, had never returned. Did Henry wish to revive this plan and did he hope to succeed where his predecessor had failed ? His thoughts are not known, but we have proof that he made persistent and thorough efforts to organise his proposed expedition.

The first and chief obstacle to success was the sea : the second was ignorance. Henry began his plans by dealing with this latter difficulty.

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tion. Being well aware that the naval history of the world had been a history of successive thefts which nations had committed against each other, he tried to steal from the Venetians nautical secrets which they, in turn, had stolen from the Arabs who had, for their part, confiscated knowledge from the Indians. (It must be remembered that to the people of those times India belonged to the same continent as Abyssinia, that mysterious country of John, the Preacher, and was called by them "Southern Ethiopia".)

Having achieved certain lore from the Venetians Henry set about correcting the grave mistakes liable to occur when chance estimates are used. He called on the services of state pilots and put them to work on deciphering all previous knowledge ; he created a professorship of mathematics ; he introduced the use of astrolabs, which determined latitudes, and of quadrants, which indicated the height of the sun. To conquer the sea he invented a new type of vessel, the *argosy*, similar to the Spanish *caravel*. But the *argosy* had three or four masts instead of one, which meant that the wind served the navigator as a galley-slave, and a forecastle strong enough to resist the swell of the sea. Henry multiplied the existing tonnage by five, and in M. Kammerer's excellent book on the *Red Sea* we may study the reproduction of a harbour-map from the *Bibliothèque Nationale* which shows us his magnificent high-seas fleet, the sails adorned with scarlet crosses, pennants and the Infanta's coat-of-arms. The ropes are so taut that they are almost at breaking-point ; the sails are blown up by the wind, an enormous stomach within the visible framework ; round watch-towers dominate the two turreted forecastles between which the double decks, one above the other, form a broken line.

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At last Henry's preparations were complete, and the task could begin. The Portuguese, whose country was so conveniently situated in the south-west corner of Europe and who really owned the Atlantic Ocean on one side while they gazed longingly at the Mediterranean on the other, were in a more favourable position than any other nation to carry out Henry's plan.

They began by exploring the west coast of Africa. In 1420 they occupied Madeira. In 1460 they were in Senegambia. As the Phœnicians had done before them they sailed down from cape to cape, anchoring their ships in the evening and then setting sail again in the morning; but unlike those sailors of the past the Portuguese navigators wore studded helmets similar to the caps worn nowadays by motor-cyclists and aviators, fastened under the chin by an iron strap. They were heavily armed and held spear-shaped swords in their hands. (See the bronzes of Bénin.)

Henry the Navigator died and his nephew John II occupied the throne of Portugal—but still the ships went on sailing round the African coast, and their route seems to us to-day like the knotted rope let down into an abyss for the rescue of mountaineers. The knots are: the crossing of the Equator in 1471; Guinea in 1482; the Cape of Storms in 1488, when Bartholomew Diaz reached his goal, passed it, stopped and then returned. The exploration of the West African coast took in all seventy-eight years and history offers few examples of such perseverance.

At the same time the Portuguese did not neglect the overland routes to India and Abyssinia. Pero de Covilham, who left Santarem in 1487, ventured across Egypt

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and reached Malabar after twice crossing the Indian Ocean. He taught the Western world that pepper and cinnamon came from Calicut, and that cloves came from the Indian Archipelago. The Abyssinians, undoubtedly disinclined to accept European progress, retained John's ambassador, and Covilham ended his days amongst them. He was married, rich and honoured, but a prisoner.

But the sea was most important. In 1498, nine years after Diaz, when Manuel II was King, Vasco da Gama set out on his journey. He left Belem with the four best ships of the fleet ; the *San Gabriel*, a vessel of eighty tons, was in command. At the very beginning of his voyage, the Commander made an extraordinarily bold decision : he determined to cut short the journey round the coast of West Africa by sailing directly from Cape Verde to the Cape of Storms reached by Bartholomew Diaz.

This meant that Vasco da Gama would sail across eighteen hundred leagues of sea without seeing land. He would venture across an unexplored ocean without any knowledge whatsoever of the prevailing winds, with no guide (the compass had not yet been invented) to help him but the position of the sun in the daytime, and the constellations in this unknown sky at night. Vasco da Gama did not know that his ship was once within barely a day's sailing distance from South America, which was not to be discovered, and then only by a similar accident, until several years later. Nevertheless, he miraculously reached the Cape of Storms which was then given more cheerful names : the Cape of Indian Hope or the Cape of Good Hope. Gama exceeded the achievements of his predecessors. He sailed up the eastern coast of Africa and reached the point which is to-day called Mombasa ;

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there he took an Indian pilot on board. In 1499 his squadron reached Calicut, between the Laccadive and Maldivé Islands, where he was amazed to find Egyptians and Chinamen living harmoniously together. He settled down as a third among them. One page in the ocean history of the world had been written.

These Portuguese discoveries affected the entire Mediterranean. Florentine merchants immediately informed Venice. The Seignior was enraged, recalled her Ambassador from Lisbon and convoked the Spice Commission. Genoa, Marseilles, and above all the Arabians, appreciated at once the inevitable consequences of this Portuguese blow at their eminence. The Pope, eager to support the victor, conferred the title of Lord of Indian Commerce on the King of Portugal.

Vasco da Gama returned to Lisbon with two witnesses, two German Jews, and a cargo of silk, porcelains, velvets, jewels and spices, which he sold at half the price paid heretofore by Europe for these goods. Despite this fact, the margin of profit was so great that two voyages paid the expenses of his journeys fifty-six times.

Cabral, Jean de Nova, Albuquerque—six expeditions in all left Portugal within four years for the new source of wealth.

In 1505 Almeida was appointed Viceroy of India, and placed in command of a local fleet originally stationed in the ports of Malabar. The Portuguese were supported by their conquests: Socotra, Saint Helena, Mozambique, the new sea route. Muscat, in the Persian Gulf, was looted; Ormuz was taken. Arabian vessels were seized at the entrance to the Red Sea, at the Straits of Bab-el-

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Mandeb. That great voyager, Albuquerque, who was the first man in history to organise systematic naval brigades, and who, by this method, successfully restrained the warlike Hindu Princes from the wholesale importation of Arabian horses for their cavalry, was in a position to close the entire Indian Ocean to the merchants from Mecca who had formerly dominated it.

Albuquerque promised the Sultan of Egypt that he could ship wood and other essential materials by way of Alexandria down the Nile and on the backs of camels to Suez. In return the Sultan built a Red Sea fleet which was to break through the Portuguese blockade. Alas, this magnificent fleet was defeated at Diu and forced to flee to Jiddah. Albuquerque was furious—so angry indeed that he seriously considered deflecting the course of the Nile and turning Egypt into a desert. He attacked Aden, an important city where Chinese, Abyssinian and Indian merchandise was stored, and penetrated into the Red Sea. The Arabs, to their consternation, saw the bolt to this gateway closing before their eyes, debarring them from the road to India and depriving them of the most profitable trade ever known to man. Albuquerque watched their horror with a certain grim humour. Through his efforts the Portuguese were victors in this conflict, known as the Pepper War, and very soon afterwards they became the chief grocers in the world.

The face of the world had changed. The blow dealt by Albuquerque was the most severe ever felt by the Ottoman Power. Shaken to its foundations that great Empire passed into an eclipse from which no future events were to save her.

The Mediterranean and her ports no longer dominated

commerce : the Atlantic had become supreme. The port of Lorient developed at the expense of Marseilles ; the large chartered companies began to develop ; the first *Compagnie pour le Commerce des Indes* was founded in 1604, and in 1664 the *Compagnie des Indes* was established by Louis XIV and immediately gave him the trade monopoly for the East Indies, Madagascar and the Red Sea. Significantly, it was stipulated that when the vessels of this company returned to France they should dock in the port of Lorient.

“Gama’s voyage to the Kingdom of Calicut in Greater India, by way of the Cape of Good Hope [Voltaire wrote in his *Essai sur les Mœurs*], completely changed the commerce of the ancient world. The Venetians, who were as eager as was Egypt to intercept the advance of the Portuguese, suggested to the Sultan of Egypt that he cut through the Isthmus of Suez at their expense and build a canal which would unite the Red Sea and the Nile. This canal would have caused them to retain the commercial domination of India, but the project was abandoned because of the great difficulties involved.”

The idea of building the Canal only *seemed* to disappear from the minds of men ; actually, thereafter, they never ceased to think about it.

Besides, the shipment of goods by way of the Isthmus at Suez never stopped entirely. The French in particular, slow as they always are to adopt changes, continued to trade in Egypt despite the duty of twenty to a hundred per cent charged on all their goods and the many annoyances they experienced in that country. Their stubborn persistence not only kept alive the problem of the Isthmus but continually reminded men of the blessings which might be brought by the completion of the Canal. From the

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age of Richelieu to that of Louis XVI, our diplomats continued to demand of Turkey the monopoly of Suez and the Red Sea. Our Egyptian trade was equally profitable to Marseilles and to the custom houses of Egypt herself.

And Suez could not be mentioned without reminding men of the Canal.

The most powerful Pasha of Suliman, Ali the Renegade, a Calabrian who had been a slave but had since become the Beylerbey of Africa, was the first to propose the reopening of the Canal, which, he asserted, would be convenient when the Turkish fleet sailed from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea. According to Henry III's Ambassador at Constantinople, Ali the Renegade succeeded in convincing even the Sultan that this idea was justified.

“The Beylerbey [we are told by a contemporary] sailed for Alexandria with twenty-five galleys, two *mahormes* and a few galleons for a purpose which seems to me impossible, or at least very difficult: he wants to open up a canal at Cairo to a town which is called Uez, at the gulf of the Red Sea. To cross this sandy desert where there is no water would take five or six days by camel. . . . He plans to employ one hundred thousand labourers for this work and to take with him forty thousand mules and twelve thousand camels to carry the drinking water. This great plan has already so inflated these Africans' usual vanity, and heightened their ambition and avarice, that they believe themselves to be already in possession of treasures and precious stones from India; they seem to think that they have caught the Persians in a net. In truth, if their hopes and their desires are realised, and they succeed in building this canal, and in launching two hundred armed galleys, as they intend to do, they will, especially as they already own Arabia, and can move without being stopped

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by anyone, close the gateway to Lisbon and Spain on this side, and enlarge and enrich their empire. In six months you will hear more about this plan.”

But within the six months the Beylerbey died suddenly and mysteriously of poisoning.

His plan was taken up by the French, who from this moment onwards made it their own, and tenaciously upheld it against the whole world. Their first task was to overcome the opposition at home (the ports of Lorient and Saint-Malo, as well as the *Compagnie des Indes*, were jealous of their monopolies). Then they had to defend the project against the Turks, the Portuguese, the Dutch, the Spaniards and finally against the English. For England resisted this plan with unparalleled tenacity. Sometimes she attacked it openly, at others she used intrigues, for she knew that if it succeeded, France would have priority in Oriental trade, and would be established in Egypt, thus placing herself in a position from which she could threaten India.

England's fears were not fanciful. It must not be forgotten that to crush England, Bonaparte chose Egypt as her vulnerable spot. As soon as he had landed, he ordered Le Père, an engineer, to prepare a plan for cutting through the Isthmus. If, half a century later, Lord Palmerston attacked the Suez Company with astonishing wrath, coarseness and bad faith, that was because, as a follower of Pitt, he had once trembled for the safety of his country at an age when impressions remain the strongest. The birth of our Suez Canal is the story of a long struggle between two men.

FERDINAND DE LESSEPS

THE Suez Canal was the outstanding idea of de Lesseps' life, an idea which was born in him when he was very young. This idea was his Call, and the outward events of his life strengthened his purpose as though obeying a predestined order. Under the Egyptian sky, in which the signs of heaven could be seen so much more clearly than elsewhere, de Lesseps, three times in succession, met his destiny face to face.

In 1832 Ferdinand de Lesseps, a consular pupil who had been sent to Egypt, was detained in Alexandria by a quarantine. To occupy him during his enforced leisure at the hospital, some friends lent him the report which Le Père had written for Bonaparte. De Lesseps was immediately enthusiastic. Sending for every plan and report obtainable he studied the history of Suez and the many projects suggested whereby the Isthmus could be crossed, and at one time he had so many as twenty plans outspread on the table before him. These began with the Beylerbey's and Pope Sixtus V's simple scheme ; went on to the more detailed projects of Mehemit Ali and Girardin, who visualised a Cairo-Suez Canal in 1685 ; continued to the Damietta-Suez Canal planned in 1698 by a very intelligent man called Monsieur Savary, to the brilliant idea of the adventurous Baron de Tott who, in 1777,

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thought of rebuilding Pharaoh's canal, to Monsieur de Volney's Nile-Red Sea Canal project of 1789; and finally to Le Père's plan for a double canal from Alexandria—Suez and from Peluse-Suez which, so this super-optimist believed, could not cost more than twenty-five or thirty millions sterling!

Then de Lesseps arrived in Cairo, where he met the second decisive experience of his life in the person of Mohammed Said, the son of Mehemet Ali. Mohammed Said liked de Lesseps because he was invincible at pistol shooting and jumping, and the two young men became intimate friends. The world owes the Suez Canal to their persistent mutual affection.

In the autumn of 1833 the Saint Simonites landed in Alexandria to work on the great Nile dam begun by Mehemet Ali. A man received them. He was the French Vice-Consul, Ferdinand de Lesseps. The route to India was ultimately changed by this association.

The Saint Simonites were an inspired collectivist sect; "industrial Popery", Benjamin Constant called their doctrines. The members of this curious secular church, who worshipped the mysticism of manual labour devoted to some great social and international work, were obsessed with the hope of uniting two seas, for this idea had been vaguely discussed in the enlightened salons of the day, and even Goethe himself had confided in Eckermann his desire to see the Isthmuses of Suez and of Panama cut through. At this time, economic venture was transfigured by the romanticism of the age, and assumed the grandeur of a crusade undertaken for the welfare and the happiness of humanity. France was basking in generous ideas, science was regarded with pious respect, and engineers

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were honoured as though they had been priests. The same lyrical atmosphere affected Hugo's *Orientales* and the letters of Père Enfantin, the leader of the Saint Simonites.

C'est à nous de faire entrer l'antique Egypte et la vieille Judée
Une des nouvelles routes d'Europe vers l'Inde et vers la Chine.
Nous poserons donc un pied sur le Nil, l'autre sur Jerusalem.
Dans nos bras nous élèverons l'urne du fleuve.
Notre main droite s'étendra vers la Mecque,
Notre bras gauche couvrira Rome et s'appuiera encore sur Paris. . . .
Suez est le centre de notre vie de travail.
Là nous ferons l'acte que le monde attend
Pour confesser que nous sommes mâles.

(I am responsible for this outline in blank verse which suits the text.)

The theoretical efforts of the Saint Simonites were a pale and somewhat ridiculous prefiguration of de Lesseps' practical achievements.

They embarked at Marseilles singing the Saint Simonite hymn. The Brothers and Sisters of the sect—for a lady of Lyons whose past does not bear close scrutiny and whose name was Agarithé Caussidière had gathered together a band of enthusiastic women who were later called by the mocking Egyptians "the ladies of the dam"—wore the uniform prescribed by their "Father" or leader: white trousers, the colour of love: red waistcoats, the colour of labour: and violet coats, the colour of faith. The inhabitants of Marseilles were astounded at sight of such a spectacle: the inhabitants of Egypt were amused. Upon the arrival of the Saint Simonites they crowded to the docks shouting quite unprintable insults, but such was the exaltation of this band of fanatics that

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they ignored the throng and marched to the Viceroy, offering him their services. The fact that their offer was politely but sternly declined by his counsellors did not dissuade these queer folk from settling on the Delta. Here, like a tribe of New Wise Men they lived in tents and dressed in Oriental fashion, and time was to show how acclimatised they became to the land of their adoption. For example, Machereau, a gay Bohemian who excelled at draughtsmanship, acting and music, but who had forsaken his many talents to follow the Saint Simonites after hearing their leader, Père Enfantin, preach at Menilmontant, remained in Egypt long after the sect, cast down by a multitude of disappointments, had abandoned their great ideas. He married an Arabian wife, became converted to Mohammedanism and grew into a respected member of the community known as Mohammed Effendi.

This Saint Simonite adventure was not, however, entirely a comic opera entertainment. There were some first-rate men among the Brothers, and although they were wrong in their belief that a canal over three hundred miles long could be built to connect Alexandria and Suez they rendered yeoman service to a great cause. The *Société d'Études pour le Canal de Suez* resulted from their twelve years of labour, during which no fewer than fifteen of them had died for sake of their ideal. And apart from these practical contributions—for, after all, lives are the most real contribution men may make in order to foster their beliefs—they spread very useful propaganda throughout Europe and de Lesseps himself referred shamelessly, time and time again, to their reports.

In brief, the material compiled by the Saint Simonites endowed the dreams of de Lesseps with a body.

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In September 1854 de Lesseps' friend, Mohammed Said, ascended the Egyptian throne. The two men had not seen each other for nearly twenty years, but this long separation had weakened neither their particular interest in each other nor their common interest in the Canal. Both were still haunted by this project, and the very day the Viceroy came to the throne de Lesseps hurried to see his friend. Twenty-four hours later they were discussing plans: four days later the concession had been signed. What a marvellous token of true friendship !

Never, in the course of a long association which personified real comradeship in the face of opposition from the whole world, did Mohammed Said cease to call de Lesseps "My very dear friend"; nor did he once fail to address his official communications to "My devoted friend of aristocratic birth and high rank".

The first task confronting these two men was the raising of the necessary money for their scheme. Somehow—nobody quite knows how, they managed to get first two hundred millions sterling, and then another two hundred. But this money was only the preliminary to their gigantic task, for the Canal had to be excavated in a desert of shifting sands under a blazing sun and de Lesseps, having but little machinery, had to rely upon lazy statute-labourers. The only means of communication between the site of the diggings and civilisation was by camel caravan, and a long procession of these brought drinking-water daily—at a cost of ten thousand francs a day ! This method proved so expensive that finally it proved necessary to make a small fresh-water canal from the Nile to Lake Timsah, and to discover the site of ancient springs; but a man like de Lesseps was not to be intimidated by such

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difficulties. In his mind he knew that his enemy was not nature, nor the Arab, nor the Sublime Port, nor the financier : his enemy was England.

He and Mohammed Said, at the very beginning of their project, had reserved eighty-five thousand shares for England. These she had refused to take up, and in the crowded House of Commons Lord Palmerston had agreed to questioning by Lord Carnarvon, who pretended to be terribly anxious because "a new Bosphorus" was being constructed. His anxiety, however, was not so great as to preclude a sarcastic remark to the effect that the work now being undertaken was so foolhardy that it would deceive none but the few simpletons who existed among capitalists.

In eulogy of this opinion *The Times* and the *Daily News* wrote contemptuously that "the art of romantic fiction was still alive in the country of Alexandre Dumas and de Lesseps"; but, in an underhanded way, Palmerston offered de Lesseps England's support if he, in his turn, would agree to give him Suez for England. When de Lesseps refused, Palmerston was so angry that the Frenchman wondered whether he was a "statesman or a maniac".

His wonderment did not have much effect upon England's ambassadors : they remained active, putting pressure upon Napoleon III, preventing the Sovereign Port of Egypt from passing decrees that would have guaranteed de Lesseps' rights, encouraging financiers in France to attack him. The last-named, hoping to use the Canal idea for their own gain, had been enraged when the general public had bought up the entire issue of shares.

Mohammed Said did not possess the vitality of his

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partner. Exhausted by the active opposition to the Canal, fretted by the virulence of the English attacks, made a scapegoat by the Sultan, he dwindled sadly, both mentally and physically, even showing de Lesseps how loose his clothes had become on his body. But if the child-like mind of the Khedive could not understand the turbulent argument of foreigners, his spirit yet remained serenely loyal to the friend whom he admired for his imagination, his Eastern charm and his Western vitality. And de Lesseps returned that loyalty a hundredfold. In September 1863, when Mohammed Said was taken seriously ill in Alexandria, de Lesseps heard the news in El Kantara. Leaving post-haste, he crossed the desert by night but arrived too late to do anything save kneel for an hour beside the dead Khedive, his head resting against his friend's turban. So ended a companionship that had been, in all its essentials, a most perfect thing.

Ismail Pasha, who succeeded his father, was not built of the same stuff, and this fact is shown horribly clearly by a comparison between the existing portraits of the two men. Mohammed Said's face was secretive and serious, bearing an expression of extreme concentration: Ismail had rounded cheeks and thick and smiling lips. And the support he gave to the *Compagnie de Suez* matched his appearance—it was half-hearted.

In England a frantic campaign against the employment of statute-labour in the Canal zone had begun. De Lesseps replied to this storm with letters which, so J. Charles-Roux tells us in his great work, *L'Isthme et le Canal de Suez*, now a classic and recognised as the standard book on the subject, "were masterpieces of logic, disdainful subtlety and dignity". But despite these letters de Lesseps was

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defeated and the Company ruined when he was deprived of his statute-labour and his sixty thousand hectares of territory.

He defended himself with reckless energy. He hurried from Constantinople to Paris, from Paris to London, from London to Alexandria, from foreign ministers to chambers of commerce, from chambers of commerce to sovereigns. He was like Napoleon during the French campaign when he seemed to be on every front at the same time: whenever one of de Lesseps' supporters weakened he rushed to give him oxygen. He threatened Morny by telling him that he was suspected of accepting bribes from Nubar Pasha, England's creature, to ruin the Company, and he even roused Napoleon III from his apathy and forced him to lend his support.

With a generosity which no one dares to question any longer, de Lesseps sacrificed personal profits, all his own belongings and savings, every possession he had in his struggles to save his scheme. Nowadays it seems incredible that such intense human effort can have been expended in an enterprise from which the founder derived no personal gain, especially since he was a man who professed to be neither saint, prophet, nor benefactor. But the entire life of this great Frenchman—his years of endeavour to stamp out the plague in Alexandria, his heroism in Catalonia when, during an insurrection, he risked his life twenty times to save the lives of others—is a proof of his philanthropic passion, a passion which does honour to the nineteenth century.

At last de Lesseps has gained his heart's desire. The Canal is completed at both ends and November 17th, 1869,

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is the day of the great inauguration ceremony. The whole of Europe, convinced suddenly of the Canal's significance, sends representatives. Gun-fire, rifle-shots, flags flying from ships, benedictions, a speech from Napoleon III at the opening of the French Parliament, congratulations sent by telegram, *Te Deums* sung in Paris, verses from the *Koran* sung at Port Said. . . .

The Sultan Abdul Aziz himself attends the festivities. Honoured by this visit from his Sovereign, the Khedive receives him kneeling ; then accompanies the royal coach on foot, one hand resting on the carriage door as a symbol of his vassalage. Ismail Pasha has spent millions : he has to feed eight hundred guests in the open desert ; his yacht of precious wood has doors made of ebony, mother of pearl and ivory, and the hinges are all of silver ; in fan-like groups on either side of the Canal stand all his subjects, summoned by him to attend the ceremony and segregated according to their race.

The Empress Eugénie descends from a camel and the Emperor Francis Joseph, wearing a blue puggaree, is smoking rose-scented tobacco from a hookah with an amber mouthpiece studded with diamonds. The Princess from the Netherlands has dressed up in trousers gathered together at the ankles, and the Emir Abd-el-Kader is chewing some sticky sweetmeats presented to him by the great Mufti of Cairo. The Khedive, wearing a Stamboul costume ablaze with medals, opens the ball in front of his tent and ventures forth into the whirl of a Viennese waltz while the Archduke Victor bends a smiling gaze on the company. The Crown Prince of Prussia is seen with the hereditary Prince of Hanover. Laces, pearls, gowns of gauze and cashmere shawls are visible in the Berlin

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coaches drawn by white horses which trot along the banks among a swarming mass of buffaloes, dromedaries, gazelles, dancing and jumping dervishes, Egyptian dancing women, and shackled goats, and camels being chased by *fellahs*.

De Lesseps is the most famous man in the world—at last ! He has more decorations than anybody else and England herself, with her usual magnanimity, has made amends. The great Frenchman is deified ; invited to London ; complimented by Lord Clarendon, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and by Gladstone, the Prime Minister. Queen Victoria confers a decoration upon him, London gives him the freedom of her city, and he is praised without reserve by his former enemy, *The Times*.

But at Marseilles, where he is a political candidate, the electors choose a politician called Gambetta instead of the man who has realised for them their ancient dream.

On November 25th, 1875, Frederick Greenwood offers Lord Beaconsfield the Khedive Ismail's one hundred and seventy-six thousand, one hundred and seven Canal shares, which the Rothschild Bank has just bought. Three days later the deal is through, and the gambled wealth of a spendthrift is transferred to the strong-box of the British Consulate at Cairo. England is the most important shareholder in the Company : the Suez Canal virtually belongs to her.

THE CANAL: PORT SAID

THE word canal conjures up the image of a trench of water between two pieces of land : here, however, it means a ribbon of land between two bodies of water—but low water, without depth, separated by sand into enormous pools or lagoons. This apparent phenomena is easily explained. The sea has impregnated the Isthmus with the salty marshes of Port Said, and the bitter lakes of Menzaleh. These latter are flanked by a succession of dunes through which the Canal wends its way so straightly that one cannot see it. Only the tall masts of ships are visible, and the vessels to which they belong seem to be moving slowly and steadily across dry land. From the splendid black road built along the white sand two years ago so that the width of the Canal should be doubled, I see nothing for miles except the monotonous crests of dunes, sloping sands, shadows which grow shorter and shorter, telegraph poles, and funny little birds hopping to and fro on the golden ground like mice.

Then, without warning, I am at a cable's length from a twenty-thousand-ton steamer. Has this ship crossed the Red Sea on foot like a Hebrew? Was she once forgotten in the desert with Cleopatra's fleet? For a moment I imagine that this vessel must be a gigantic toy left on the beach by a child, but soon I see a thin thread

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of water which licks plaintively at her feet and I know that I am looking at this queer Canal between two mounds of earth—one mound being African, the other Asiatic.

Such are the exigencies of modern engineering that these two scraps of continents are called, coldly, "side-pilings", and as I stare at them I remember the letters of those men who were responsible for the earliest and most vital work on the Canal. In their time there were no mechanical means of dredging, and the mud was dug out with hoes, then passed from hand to hand, and finally pulled up the bank in dredging baskets.

In the low waters of Lake Menzaleh, fishermen drive the fish towards the shore, and naked divers, whose skin is lemon coloured, catch them in the round nets so like those used by Egyptian quail-hunters.

The entrance to the Canal is at Port Said ; the opening at the other end is Suez. Seen from the air, Port Said looks like a large white island followed by a small black island. Both appear to be suspended like trinkets from a cord, and this cord is the Suez Canal which stretches out in a direct line towards the desert. In the south the Canal is blue, the colour of Erythraea ; in the north it is bluey-green, the colour of the lagoon which extends as far as the horizon, curving under the clouds. This horizon is so Venetian, so delicate between the two clear expanses, that Port Said seems to be suspended in thin air.

Behind the feathery reeds along the banks of the Canal the funnels of steamers loom up abruptly, and these smoke-stacks are ornamented with lozenges, stars, squares and streaks of colour, with all the heraldic insignia, in fact, which has been invented by steamship companies. Between the line of red buoys by the coast of Africa and the

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white buoys by the Asiatic coast which mark the borders of this artificial river, ships follow and pass each other so close to me that I could almost jump on to their decks. The life on board continues, though the ships are now really on land : meals are announced by the sounding of gongs, nurses and stewardesses continue their work, passengers lean back in cane chairs, gentlemen can be seen through the port-holes brushing their teeth, and I can watch missionaries dressed in white, Hindu or Javanese servants. The deck games have not been interrupted, service bells are ringing, children have organised races, sport-loving passengers, enervated by this inactive life, are marking out the decks, and the kitchen staff are peeling potatoes. From the banks of the Canal this life on board can be observed in a cross-section, like a page in a prospectus.

A great variety of ships follow each other quickly : there is a cleverly constructed yacht with long, graceful and old-fashioned lines, carrying two young Egyptian couples who are reclining comfortably on the rear deck. They are on their way to the Red Sea where they will catch many-coloured fish tasting of sulphur : the yacht is followed by a Bibby Line steamer heavily loaded with Burmese rice : then comes the *Enterprise*, a large British man-o'-war, gliding along proudly like a Victory of Samothrace, and one feels her strength is so great that she will be able to defy the sun and wind : farther away, a line of Italian vessels are waiting to enter the Canal, like eager spectators standing at the doors of a theatre until they are admitted to a fashionable play.

How small the buildings of Port Said seem in comparison with these floating palaces. The oldest houses in Place Lesseps were not built until 1870, for Port Said developed

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with the Canal. The parallel roads near the sea leading to the port are crowded with hideous curio shops, kept by Hindus, where forgetful travellers may buy their last-minute souvenirs. These dreadful shopkeepers are clever enough to move their gallow-like signs to the middle of the road, and when a steamer arrives they wisely hurry from their lighted shops with their goods even though it is in the middle of the night when the town is asleep. For these Hindus realise that customers no longer notice the shop windows filled with silks, or elephants of ebony or ivory.

The dance halls, *eldorados* and casinos, which inspire writers who use material published fifty years ago for their books, have ceased to exist. Port Said is modest and easily shocked ; serious games are played at her two clubs, the *Maltese* and the *Greek*. Port Said's reputation was bad before the Canal was kept open all night, for then passengers, waiting to sail through it, spent the night drinking. This old legend about Port Said is, however, still believed by many people. Actually, if a traveller who is far away from home wants adventure, he must hurry by car to the Fish Market in Cairo, or wait until he reaches Djibouti to see tattooed negresses performing stomach dances. For to-day Port Said is not even a port of call : the " Canal " stakes its honour on seeing that vessels pass quickly to their destinations without difficulties or delay.

The Canal is a power : its army is British, its working-class Greek, its dock managers Italian and its administration French. When the British Empire purchased the majority of the shares and became the master of the Canal, she wanted to leave the administration in our hands. Perhaps she was prompted to do so by courtesy or diplomacy, or

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perhaps she disliked announcing her own power too publicly.

It is certain that had we not done well we should have been relieved of this administration ; but we have performed our duties to the general satisfaction of everyone.

From Port Said onwards the Suez Company is in control. The town belongs to the Company and so does Port Fuad opposite. Twenty years ago Port Fuad was merely a narrow tongue of sandy ground ; now it shelters coal deposits and repair workshops. Behind the replacement propellers with red blades which look like a flower-bed, are grouped the elements of a well-organised town with French chiefs and assistant chiefs and Greek workmen. The Company's wages are high, they are paid promptly in gold, and the services rendered by this organisation are beyond reproach. The Company greets new arrivals with the bronze statue of Monsieur de Lesseps, which stands at the entrance to Port Said holding out a welcoming hand to all travellers. (Some people, however, will tell you that the hand is merely outstretched in a gesture without meaning.)

In full view of our own *Guépard*, lying low as though on all fours and sturdy of back, in full view also of the British *Valiant* whose tripod mast disappears behind her high bridges built one on top of each other, the Suez Canal opens its large mouth at Port Said and devours half the tonnage of the world. All types of ships, all sorts of hulls, the flags of all nations are received ; vessels cruising round the world, *Columbuses* of forty thousand tons, *Empresses* of fifty thousand, one after the other enter the banks of cement, like simple vedette-boats, and then disappear into the æsophagus of the salty lakes. Within this carnivorous

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mouth the jetties and moles seem like teeth, and although the Canal swallows everything without discrimination, it suffers neither from hiccups nor indigestion, despite the sand storms and the unloosed winds.

The Canal placidly chews its daily food ; its millions of tons, its hundreds of thousands of passengers a year. As a result, the Canal grows fatter every day by from two to three million francs. This year, the Canal derived from Italy one hundred million added profits which it bolted down with satisfaction.

The Delta and the Nile mud tries in vain to submerge Port Said ; the dredging machines, quicker than the mud, stir up and then remove the sand with a strong current of water and fling it back into the desert. I watch the continuous offensive of hostile nature against this constructive system, and compare this struggle with that other danger, the slackness of the Arabs, whose houses in the poorer districts reflect their carelessness. (These houses, shaken by a trembling of the earth, are apparently undecided whether they shall collapse or straighten up again, and finally compromise by adopting a middle course.) And I ask myself what will happen to the Canal after the original lease has expired in 1968 and it reverts to the ineffectual hands of this fatalistic race ? “ No one is more canal-minded than I am, but I want the Canal to belong to Egypt, and not Egypt to the Canal,” Ismail, the Khedive, declared in 1863. All Egyptians have to-day adopted this attitude, and the new agreement signed a few days ago supports this point of view.

In the meanwhile, French method prevails in Port Said ; it is an orderly place administered in the good old style of the Second Empire, and shows what Frenchmen can do

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. . . outside their own capital. Two of our compatriots, Lyautey in Morocco and de Lesseps in Egypt, succeeded in establishing in Africa that strict law and order which Carrel imposed on the laboratories of New York ; and Forestier introduced into the Spanish-American Gardens ; and Father Robert infused into Chinese municipal government, which had been so confused until he came.

A SIDING IN THE CANAL

ANYWHERE else these sidings would be dignified by the name of port. About twelve of them are spaced out at intervals along the Canal, and each only knows its neighbour, with whom it talks by signals. They salute each other with the tops of pliant eucalyptus trees, swaying in the wind, and send each other ships. In little houses in the background, two men in charge of the siding live together. One of them is on duty while the other sleeps, stakes peas or plays Brahms.

How silent it is along the greatest canal in the world ! The gurgling of the water is quieter than in a small river. A yellow immobility and a blue state of stagnation dominate the scene, inducing such lethargy that one wonders if anything ever happens here. And yet such widely different steamers pass this place continuously ; proud or shame-faced vessels, those which are carrying home dividends and others which live on subsidies, those which have come from the ultra-modern dockyards of countries governed by dictators, and others from democracies where ship-builders have been content to stop up the cracks with cement or to support the bending hull with simple chains. Some of these ships have been built to give their country publicity, while others are the despair of insurance agents.

The little sidings of the Suez Canal with their look-out cabins, with their masts and rigging, resemble stranded ships which will never set sail again. Globe trotters among

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ships laugh at the immobility of these places. They know that they will be here when, in a month, they return from India, or in two from Australia, weatherbeaten by the monsoon, scratched by drawing alongside in docks, and whitened by salt.

Each siding obviously shares the detachment from the world and the contempt for wealth felt by the storks living near the Canal, and by the anchorites, their neighbours in Sinai. Nothing which passes a siding, neither the joy, nor the greed, not the hunger or thirst of the world makes it envious. The siding is aware that none of these riches are intended for it—it will never possess the rice from Rangoon, the Rolls-Royce cars belonging to Rajahs, the Begums' ruby necklaces, the Paris ingots which attract London, the metal money belonging to Chinese merchants, the treasures of avaricious sultans and the dishonest profits made by untrustworthy civil servants, the cottons and silks, the jade and dynamos. The siding philosophically accepts the fact that these riches can never linger.

The chief of the siding supervises the shunting of the vessels. He sits at his telegraph instrument, his binoculars lying on his service papers, his hand on the switchboard controlling the signals—round signals by day and fires by night—and allows ships to move on, or instructs them, on the contrary, to wait in the Lakes.

"The *Leconte de L'isle*? At fifty kilometre . . ."

"The *Belvedere*? At forty kilometre . . ."

On the blackboard placed conspicuously before him on the terrace, the siding-master attaches large movable figures, giving the name of his station, the hour when the last ship passed (the minimum interval between two ships is twenty minutes), and any other information which will

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be useful for the pilots who can see these signals from the bridge of the passing vessel.

The siding-master consults his books and gives precedence to ships loaded with explosives or petrol. He instructs some petrol ships to dock, or in case of danger, he may order them to pour out their cargo; he signals general averages and his despotic commands advise the ships of all nations.

Sometimes when the theft of some fishing smack has occurred, the nets are laid in the vast expanse of the Bitter Lakes at night. Some Greek workmen are repairing old iron and then return to their Greek village in Ismailia. Evening falls, the white immeasurable sands turn a yellow sulphur colour, then chamois. A few dromedaries, kneeling as though for their evening prayer, submit to being shackled for the night. The coastguards in their boats watch suspected fishermen waiting to take from some buoy a consignment of opium or a white iron case full of Indian hemp left there by some Indo-Chinese steamer. These coastguards are supported by the Egyptian Camelry Police, by police on motor-cycles, and the special agents of the drug brigade, established by Russell Pasha. Actually, the Canal is most carefully guarded, and I know of no frontiers which are more efficiently defended.

"I have finished my duties," the siding-master says. He has a Neapolitan accent.

He folds up his telescope, closes his desk, places his signal-board on the rack, and goes down to look after the lettuce in his garden. This absolute master of this little side port gazes quietly at Asia, a hundred feet away; he is indifferent to the mystery of the Continent, a mystery which is so close to him.

THE PILOT

THE pilot of the Suez Canal is not an unkempt individual, awakened in the middle of the night by a siren, who climbs barefooted by a rope to the deck of the vessel needing his services. On the contrary, he is a man of the world with a large salary, who alights from his Packard car, driven by a liveried chauffeur, and speaks to you with easy good humour like the French gentleman that he is. He will be on duty for six hours on the bridge of your boat, seeing that no harm comes to her; he will correct the dangerous drift of the desert wind which blows with mighty force against the upper decks of the bigger ships. When necessary, the pilot navigates the fifty thousand tons entrusted to him to the side of the Canal, and keeps the vessel at a safe distance from the sparks of deadly petrol ships or from ships with explosive cargoes. He also copes with the currents, and as he approaches Suez and the tides, he steers the vessel safely into the Red Sea, at the foot of Gebel Atâqua.

All the ships of the world, for a few hours, belong to this one responsible person, the pilot of the Canal. Whether the vessels are easy to handle or stubborn, whether they have reverse gears or special turbines, one screw or four, whether they are armed for death or for pleasure, they are all in the pilot's hands. He knows them all,

THE PILOT

he has piloted them all; the *Victoria* of the Lloyd Triestino, the *Strathmore* of the P. & O., with her clientèle of Rajahs; the *Orion* of the Orient Line, so popular among prominent Australian colonials, who hope in vain that she will carry off the Indian blue ribbon; two beautiful new Japanese ships, the *Terukuni Maru* and the *Yusukumi Maru*; the *Johann van Odenbarneveldt* and *Marnix van Suit Adegonde* of the Netherland and the Rotterdam Lloyd, vessels which go to Bali; the German ships *Gneisenau* and *Scharnhorst*, pride of the Hitlerian merchant marine in the Far East (which, so it is said, could be easily converted into auxiliary men-o'-war); the Wouvermann boats which attract passengers from South Africa; the Italian vessels transporting Abyssinian prisoners who kiss the Cross which their priests wearing red Dalmatics hold out to them; and our own steamers of the Messageries which pass here too, when Marseilles is not on strike.

The pilot knows these ships so well that he is indifferent to them. By the time he makes his second voyage no vessel seems new to him, and he takes no notice of their modern conveniences or their efforts to outbid each other. He is familiar with their defects and their weaknesses; he knows which of them have been lengthened and which have had a new nose fashioned in Germany. When the telephone rings, he gets up from his game of bridge, and calmly goes aboard the steamers belonging to the Dollar Line, the British India Line, the Lloyd Triestino, the Blue Funnel, the Holland Line, the German Africa Line, the N.K.Y. of Natal, the Union Castle, the Netherland, the Norddeutscher or the Rotterdam Lloyd, the Anchor or the Bibby Line, the Henderson, Albion, Ellerman or Svenska Ostasiatika Lines.

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On the steamers navigated by the pilot all the languages of the world are spoken ; the flags of these ships represent every nation and the crews all human races. As soon as the pilot arrives, the captain of each ship turns over the command to him and leaves the bridge. The pilot is welcomed on every voyage as an old friend ; sherry and sandwiches are brought up to him. He never loses sight of the Canal lights, or of the signal-boards of the local sidings ; he is in touch with the central stations by wireless. He is utterly calm, yet constantly on the alert as he steers the ship at a speed of fourteen kilometres an hour, directing the course of these temporary kings of the desert towards Asia or Europe.

ON THE BANKS OF THE CANAL: ISMAILIA

TO understand the Canal, this close-knit path on the road to India, in all its majesty, one must be familiar with canal life, must have dwelt among the inhabitants of this sandy paradise, in the shadow of the fluffy fillaos and the tamarind trees. Really to understand the Canal one must have stroked the Sinaitic goats with Semitic profiles and the dromedaries in a wooden hut next to the little guard-house in the desert. These little houses are built without foundation, and have no reason for existing but to protect, in their modest way, the giants of the seas that pass before them, their bows pressed against the wind, moustaches of foam at their prows, their nostrils damp from mildew at the hawse-holes, smoke curling behind them like locks of hair, the pilot's blue ensign at the top-mast, the national flag flapping at the stern, the searchlight proudly fixing its gaze into space, the hull and decks flooded with light, with music and dancers, with drinkers enjoying champagne and with bridge-players. These enormous electrified vessels, with their crystal and glass, their fire and light, throw the little mud and straw guard-houses into obscurity, and sheep, afraid of the fox, sleep in the starlit shadows under the piling of these derelict buildings. To understand the Canal, furthermore, one should go

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round the winding shores of the Bitter Lakes and climb up the hill dominated by the monument to the Defence of the Canal ; one should see, at the Residency, de Lesseps' simple room and his old iron bed ; one should gaze in awe at the amazing sight of water and of greenness, of flowers and of shadows, presented by Ismailia.

And yet I do not like verdure in the desert ; it represents too much effort, and here flourishing gardens seem sad, a *tour de force*. The flowers and trees are like objects of paste in a box of toys ; no mad weeds unite them with the sun or with each other. In Ismailia, however, it is delicious to rest one's eyes, aching from the sight of the stony landscapes parched under the sun, on green lawns. The fresh water, brought from the Nile to Ismailia, is responsible for this extraordinary vegetation which is so much greener than the green of an oasis. The flora of Ismailia is like that in an ideal Monte Carlo, in a fairyland Rio, an imaginary Santa Barbara. The homes of the Canal agents are bordered with splendid asphalt avenues, with flowers and lawns ; here and there, deep red illuminated patches emerge from the copper-coloured cineraria and bougainvillæa.

Ismailia, exactly half-way between Port Said and Suez, is the capital of the small French province governing the Canal. Ismailia is clean, precise, responsible, hardworking, struggling against nature and yet correcting and taming her ; in brief, the city is a true Frenchwoman. There are French citizens in Ismailia ; engineers and civil servants, as well as foreigners ; British soldiers, Syrian mechanics, Arabian fishermen, and vigilant Italians. Perhaps the most useful members of this community are the Greek workmen. They can apparently get on without food or

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sleep ; they are never tired or irritable ; they seem completely happy among dynamos and turbines, or when they are driving motor-cars or repairing machinery. They place their tremendous capacity for work, their good humour, their adroitness and their sobriety in the service of an *idée fixe* : they want, above all, to acquire enough money to give their daughters a good dowry.

Ismailia's beach on the banks of the Canal is very French, like the plage at La Baule. In January, naked infants play in the sun on the sand. They are pretty children of pure French blood and, despite Hitler, almost all of them are blond. These youngsters frolic and roll about, shout, splash each other and then dry themselves under the cloudless sun. They play in transparent water, which, heaven knows why, is avoided by the sharks from the Red Sea.

This beach extends to the spot where the Canal flows into the first of the Lakes, at Timsah. Here it is enlarged, then recovering its course, between Tussum and Serapeum, it again becomes a canal, a river-like watercourse with gently declining banks. After this, the Canal swells once more, this time to enormous dimensions, and joins the Bitter Lakes. At Tussum, a straight double pyramid commemorates the death of those who died in the defence of the Canal. This pyramid, the only vertical line in these sands, stands erect at the entrance to Egypt facing the deserts of Palestine, Syria and Hedjaz.

THE MONUMENT TO THE DEAD WHO DIED IN DEFENCE OF THE CANAL

THE desert lies in wait for Ismailia, hemming it in, and then flings itself upon the town before she has time to build any suburbs. As a result, Ismailia ends abruptly on the rising road which dominates the greenness. At this point, in February 1915, the Fourth Turkish Division, commanded by Djemal Pasha and General von Kress, tried to cross the Canal.

This was not a simple raid. The Germans and the Turks had carefully prepared a far-reaching offensive with forty thousand men and heavy artillery. This expedition, however, was not successful because it was too difficult to replenish the supplies of food and ammunition, and because the division was three kilometres from the base. Djemal hoped to seize the Canal unexpectedly and then instigate a revolt against the English in Egypt. This cruel and reckless young Turk wanted, at all costs, to be victorious so that he could dazzle Enver. "I shall not return to Constantinople until I have conquered Egypt," he called out to his troops on the quays of Haidar Pasha.

The English, in turn, were equally confident. When Father Jaussen of the Architectural College in Jerusalem, who had been ejected from Palestine by the Turks, pre-

MONUMENT TO THE DEAD

sented himself to the British General Staff in Cairo, reported the preparations for this attack, and predicted that the enemy would soon arrive, he was not taken seriously.

Yet from the historical point of view this was a most critical moment. Bulgaria's participation in the War added several Turkish divisions to this expedition. The allies could not decide whether to attack Alexandretta or to land troops in the Dardanelles. The Mesopotamian Campaign had been checked, the Arabian revolt had not yet succeeded ; in the west, the Senussi Brotherhoods were moving towards the Libyan frontier, and in the east, Djemal was approaching.

Djemal began his offensive on the 3rd of February. He had ten thousand camels, but a shortage of supplies prevented him from holding the Asiatic coast for long. Whatever happened, however, he was forced either to fight or to retreat. He attacked Ismailia, where the Canal is straightest and easy to cross, but at this point, too, the Canal is not difficult to defend. The Allies took up a protected position in front of the tracks for the armoured trains, and behind ditches filled with water. The Indian and New Zealand troops, entrenched on the banks of these ditches, were sheltered behind the battleships moored in the Lakes, and continuously lighting up the shadows with their searchlights.

It had been difficult for the Turks to bring their heavy artillery from Syria ; the guns had been dragged through the desert sands by Anatolian cattle. During the day, this Turkish Army had hidden among the dunes ; at night the attack began. A Turkish " dog " gave the alarm and awakened the " dogs " in the British camp. The enemy had arranged to sink the pontoons and the dinghies with

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galvanised iron brought with them on the backs of their camels; and all except one were sunk. The Turkish soldiers who tried to swim across on floating water-skins were taken prisoner or killed.

In the morning, the outcome of the battle was undecided. In the Lakes the British warship, the *Hardinge*, had been struck and was obliged to leave. But our cruisers, the *Entrecasteaux*, and above all the *Requin*, had spotted the heavy battery and reduced it to silence. Camels' limbs were shot up into the air, and seven thousand of these animals and about a thousand of the enemy were killed. A council of war was held towards evening: von Kress wanted to continue the battle at the risk of sacrificing the Turkish Army. Djemal, who loathed the Germans, would not agree, and ordered the retreat, swearing that he would return the following year. But he was unable to keep his word, because a year later the Turks were in the Dardanelles and the Arabian revolt had broken out behind them.

The Suez Canal was saved. The only troops to cross it later were the allied soldiers during their counter-offensive in Palestine. The world traffic through the Canal was not interrupted for a single day. The ships passing through merely took the precaution of protecting their passengers by placing sacks of sand on the decks.

On the Asiatic shore one can still see the iron nets and the trenches used to defend the Canal almost a quarter of a century ago. I saw masses of tangled and rusty barbed wire, black from the salt and resembling curly hair fallen from a comb, ten years ago. It looked as though it could never be used again. . . . To-day I found it remade as good as new, being used for fresh entanglements. Some Scottish troops are going into the desert of Tih for their

MONUMENT TO THE DEAD

manceuvres ; their camels, equipped as during the War, carrying provisions in huge nets made of palm fibres which hang like pockets from each side of their pyramid humps. A lantern is attached to the long neck of each camel. With the mules and the Scots soldiers in their kilts and smoking their pipes, these beasts are waiting for the ferry. Air patrols make sure that the communication between the units is in order. The leaders of the pack animals crack their whips ; then they pick up the harness to carry it to the top of a dune.

The midday sun shines on these war-like preparations and the scene is ablaze in the pure light.

THE TWO FERRIES ACROSS THE CANAL

EL KUBRI and El Kantara are the two points at which ferries across the Canal connect Asia with Africa. These ferries are open to everyone : to caravans, to British troops, to the rare motor-cars which come this way and to droves of camels. The northern ferry is used by passengers from the Cairo-Palestine railway ; the southern one is a crossing on the road to Sinai. They both serve a religious purpose, for they are both approaches to the Faith : El Kantara leads the Christians from the West to the Holy Land and Jerusalem : El Kubri shows African Mohammedans the way to Medina and Mecca.

Christian Europe crosses the Canal at El Kantara. The night train from the Asiatic shore deposits passengers the next morning at Jerusalem. Many European Christians arrive in Port Said or Alexandria before Holy Week : Italian monks, young Irish priests, German Sisters of Charity, Greek priests, their hair in a knot, and above all, a large number of French and Belgian pilgrims, leaders of church guilds with white imperials, and maiden ladies from Vendée with the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in red cloth, sewn on their grey dustcoats. Wealthy provincials talk to the Father responsible for the sleeping-car accommodations of his flock, make themselves comfortable for

THE TWO FERRIES

the night, and then, in a French as clear and dry as glacier air, they speak to each other so distinctly that what they say can be heard from one end of the carriage to another. These pilgrims are untiring in their utterances of complaints. They jostle each other, eager to get a room the next morning at Notre Dame de France. They are dominated by one idea: to arrive in time for the nine-o'clock mass at Saint-Sepulchre.

Only a small section of the vast holy caravan which, in thousands of groups, goes each year to Mecca, passes El Kubri. A traveller, who was a contemporary of Shakespeare, has left us an astonishing description of these pilgrims in the records of Hakluyt.

“It was like a nation on the march [Nerval says, for in his times the pilgrims marched across the desert in a crowd]. The ‘Moroccans’ (pilgrims from North Africa) met in Cairo, crossed to Sinai and descended to Mecca by way of Akabo and Yambo. They were at the mercy of camel-drivers, soldiers, tent-trimmers, of men who stabled horses, and of water-sellers. Those of the pilgrims who were not robbed of their life were robbed of their savings.”

To-day, this journey is expensive enough (three to four thousand francs), but the King of Hedjaz, who pockets most of the profits from this tax, has organised these expeditions with the help of *protecteurs* and committees. The arrangements for these religious tours are based on the perfected plans made for the Beyrouth Conference of 1929. Motor-cars, aeroplanes and steamers have taken the place of camels and clumsy boats. The *Misr*, the great national bank of Egypt, and the Khedive's navigation company, arrange the journey for European pilgrims from Asia Minor

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to the Interior of Africa at a fixed price, which includes the cost of food. Lines of motor-cars plough through the desert and in eight hours devout Persians or Afghans are driven from the depths of Asia to the Red Sea. At Suez and at Tor there are vaccination and disinfection stations, and medical commissions in the local ports carry out inspections. Immediately after the Beiram festival, the authorities close the ports, and stragglers, deserters and irregular visitors are then rounded up.

If, by chance, the ghost of Gérard de Nerval were to leave the street-lamp where he hanged himself, and prowls about on this road to Mecca, he would see nothing extraordinary. The days of processions with holy candles from El Kubri to Cairo are over: this sacred pilgrimage has become a commonplace business enterprise.

ENGLISH AND ITALIANS

AN Italian ship, on her way to Eritrea, is approaching. She carries a large cargo of about twelve thousand tons. She is tired, like an exhausted horse which is given practically no rest at a stopping-place and is not even brushed down. Tanks and lorries are huddled together on the ship's decks; her plimsoll line has disappeared beneath the surface of the water. Her masts, funnels and wireless aerial seem to rise with difficulty from this heap of tractors, engines, and other heavy vehicles with round stupid eyes—their empty front lights. These vans must have been requisitioned quickly, for old lettering is still visible on their sides: *Vermouth Cinzano* or *Ligne Boulogne-Padua*.

There are few sick and wounded on board, but the pile of old iron on the decks reminds one of bad roads, of wheels deep in the mud, and one can guess to what wear and tear these tractors have been exposed. At the front, Fiat and Ford have established two service and repair stations, but these workshops cannot cope with all the work brought to them. On this ship, passing so near us, there is no room for soldiers. The leaders of convoys and the mechanics are asleep in their tents. Here and there, the wheel of a tractor hangs in mid-air over the water. Many of these vehicles will be broken during the

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Atlantic storms, but here the weather is good, the Red Sea is smooth, Ethiopia is not far away, and the British soldiers watch this cargo, now not unusual, without anxiety.

In the bow a few men are throwing out their chests and snuffing the fresh breeze. Their heads are small, set closely on their necks, and their short curly hair is like the reverse side of a medal from Syracuse. These men are glorious specimens of the Latin race. They are idling away their time, they are relaxed. . . . But suddenly they see the Scottish troops standing next to us; other young gods, whose skin is less bronzed and more brown, whose faces are of another type, rose and blond, representing the Celtic race.

“Long live the Duce!”

The Italians stand to attention, salute and there is something of defiance in their gestures; a sense of victory shines in their eyes, but it is a victory without hatred or vulgarity.

The Scottish soldiers do not respond to this salute. They are expressionless, and their red hands remain hanging beside their kilts. They are impassive, leaning against their pack-camels; the men are as immovable as the animals. Here British imperturbability and Oriental fatalism meet. These sons of the moors stand firmly in the sand. Like the Sphinx, they are sure that they have plenty of time. . . .

THE MONUMENT TO THE SOLDIERS OF INDIA

A MEMORIAL monument is the first object a European, going to the Orient, sees when he leaves the Canal. The first gesture made by Indians is the sign of the Cross. And the first Hindus one encounters on the imperial road are dead.

A boomerang of history has caused India, where Dupleix created the first European militia, the Sepoys, to send them back to us exactly two hundred years later.

The two Indian divisions which we saw crossing Marseilles were followed by a third. The Rajahs forgot their frivolous idleness, their hunts, their quarrels about precedent, their concern about the number of rounds to be fired from the guns according to a man's rank. Gwalior gave a long line of ambulances, Hyderabad an army, Indore his best horses, Cooch Behar supported the Prince of Wales's Foundation, Mysore opened his huge treasure chests, Nepal alone sent two hundred thousand men, Patiala enlisted as a volunteer, Bhopal wore the red insignia of a general staff officer.

The Flanders winter was too cold for these Indians, however, and the colonial army was sent to Egypt. In Mesopotamia, the Royal Indian Marines attacked Baghdad, defended the Canal, and supported Allenby's offensive in

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Palestine. The Bengal Lancers and the Lahore Division fought at Ypres, the Bikanir dromedary corps and the Sikhs at El Kantara, the sappers of Bombay at Neuve Chapelle, the Dekkan cavalry at Doullens and Cambrai, the Punjab regiments at Aden, the mountaineers at Kut.

India allowed Lord Hardinge, one of her great Viceroy, to draw on the three hundred and eighteen million men in the country and to take one million for the War: Madras, Bombay, Bengal, Burma, the Punjab, Agra and Oudh, Assam, the Central Provinces, the frontier districts, Kashmir, Lahore, Lucknow, Baluchistan, sombre Dekkan itself sent representatives of all their races to an astonished Europe: Turkish-Iranians, Indo-Aryans, Scytho-Dravidians, Hindus, Mongolians and Cingalese.

The names of men of the high Brahmin caste, distinguished by the scarlet sign of prosperity on their forehead, of members of the Sivajist sect, who wear the phallus of the god with three eyes round their necks, men bearing noble Sanskrit titles, and others who distinguished themselves during the Hindu epoch are engraved side by side on the tombstone of this Memorial Monument at Port Tewfik with popular names taken from colours, animals or crafts. Whether their bones were whitened in the desert sands or disintegrated by the quicklime of France, these dead of the Great War now blaze the trail to India, pointing out the road to their home.

SUEZ

I REMAINED for a long time at the foot of the Memorial steps, which are flanked on both sides with two superb tigers. The sculptor has stopped them half-way in their leap and, their mouths open, they face the world at large. Evening was falling on the Gulf of Suez. The sea, the colour of egg-plant, was outlined at the horizon with a ribbon of greenish blue of the Sassanid pottery shade usually reserved for the days of the heavy wind, the *hamshin*. A windy swell splashed against the towing boats ranged before the Company's workshops, where Lascars were combing out on dry land hundreds of buoys on which the red oxide of lead gleamed under the rays of the sinking sun.

In the east, in a thundercloud turning a purplish hue from the rising powdery sand, Sinai had disappeared, but in the west the mountains of Ataka loomed up, enormous and yet misty ; supporting with their heavy summits made light by the fog the thick clouds pierced here and there by blue holes through which fiery rays of sun shone down upon the water and the desert. They were like the rays of light springing from the forehead of Moses, the only human being who made sweet the bitter springs of this country. A promontory, shaped like the nose of a crocodile, the nose of Ombos, a saurian god, was level with the surface of the water, brilliant in the daylight. It was very

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clear along that long beach of fifty kilometres, and I longed to bathe in this water which was so shallow that a shark would not have had room to turn over in it. Behind me rose masts, minarets, silvery reservoirs for fuel oil, and the chimneys of the Anglo-Egyptian Oilfields' refineries.

In the dusk, the Orient has that mysterious beauty which it lacks during the day; the roads seem narrower, the houses appear to be losing their balance, their bow windows move together, touching each other lightly, then separate again, because there are little alleyways between them.

In the stalls, lighted by acetylene lamps, pressed dates, looking like huge blocks of amber, are sold. This glutinous mess, the chief diet of the desert, is quite sufficient for existence. A Bedouin buys a pound of date paste and lives on it for a month. Some children are passing, and on a metal tray they carry a pyramid of Arabian bread, with soft crusts and no crumbs. When these loaves are cut through they present golden cavities. Slices of fresh shark, mullets and chrysophrys are displayed on Delta seaweed which resembles clover or alfalfa. Quails, an exquisite Egyptian dish, are chirping shrilly in their baskets. It is forbidden to catch them in nets, but this law is not observed. These birds are packed alive in cases and shipped to Europe. The poor little animals refuse to eat, and men are employed to feed them by force. These feeders, who chew the grain and then push it into the birds' beaks, are exposed to a terrible disease, the so-called "quails' disease", to which many of them succumb. For three piastres a day, however, men can still be found to do this work.

In these streets one can also see the hares of the desert, and the first spring lambs which have been scented down

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and chased by white Arabian gazelle hounds. Here, too, in small barrels, are olives looking like black shiny eyes, the truffles of the desert. And chickens are scratching about everywhere and laying their eggs as far afield as the space in front of the hairdresser's chair. The mules are unsaddled; the bags and leather bottles have been piled on to the camels' saddles. At the gates of the Mosque a blind man is reciting words as monotonous and as lustreless as his sightless eyes.

Gobineau wrote: "Suez is so unlike Cairo, because at Suez one feels the nearness of exotic foreign countries." What makes these streets, like the roads of Aleppo, so different and so foreign is the presence of thin and sombre Bedouins among the debonair Egyptians. The secretive eyes of these Bedouins, men without masters, reflect the desert.

Suez, a port which has been silted up for centuries, a hopeless blind-alley, out of date and numb, could not understand the tremendous adventure de Lesseps created for it in the nineteenth century. Suez was not prepared for her unexpected good fortune and therefore allowed a neighbouring town, Port Tewfik, to reap the benefits. Suez, fatalistic and resigned, has remained an Arab city with more mosques than masts.

It is not difficult to imagine what Suez was like in the year 160 of our era. Lucian tells us about a young Roman who embarked in that year at Alexandria, and, travelling up the Nile, reached the port of Clysma, on the Red Sea. The Sea, larger than it is to-day, came up as far as the Bitter Lakes. The young man sailed up the Canal reconstructed by the Ptolemys, and reached Clysma, the Suez of those days, from where he set sail for Hedjaz, Yemen

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and India. But one day Clysma was overcome by the torpor of Islam. Neglected, the Canal silted up, and goods had to be conveyed by caravan, while camels replaced boats.

To-day, half-revived, Suez can hardly remember that she harbours ancient relics consisting of temple debris and very old soil. Suez does not know that, a survivor of a great age, she is worthy of the services she has rendered to the excavations organised until recently by the Company. Suez prefers to remain an agglomerate mass of consulates and shipping agents; the town likes to forget the north from where her life is derived and to welcome the next adventure coming from the south.

Immemorial sounds and new noises vibrate in confusion in Suez: the long wails of unhappy steamers waiting to pass through the Canal, impatient ships, desiring urgently to reach the Mediterranean; travellers exhausted by their long voyage, tired of so many landscapes, lonely and feeling deserted, knock with impatient anger at the gateway to Europe. Suez is familiar also with the whistling of the sandy wind which shakes the clay houses, rattles the shutters and tears at the Resident's flags. This wind presses the Arabs' clothing against their thin legs, and the black veils against the women's cheeks. Their faces are half-covered with hair-nets, and a little gold cylinder at the root of the nose makes their profiles look Greek. The women's eyes are as black as coal and their lids are made up with green paint. They gaze at the men as though through iron bars. In the cafés, believers listen stolidly to the Muezzin prayer coming out of the loud-speaker, and the air smells of Mocha coffee and the damp Persian tobacco which reminds one of long manes of blond hair, damp with

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sweat. These believers enjoy the modern comforts of the establishment, and listen to another voice full of promise—the hooting of American cars conveying some of the steamer passengers across the desert in one harrowing day. They are eager to reach Cairo quickly, because for seventeen minutes they will see the sun sinking behind the Pyramids. The Sphinx will glow like a flash-lamp under the fiery sun and then night will fall. Those guests in the café who have been asleep will be suddenly awakened by a quaint angelus which is not in the least melancholy or gently persuasive like our church bells. This Suez angelus is hard, dictatorial, fanatic; it is administered to the town as punishment is meted out to a child. Continuously, also, one can hear the whistling of the little train which starts off as though on a real journey only to follow a course of three miles and end at the docks of Port Tewfik.

Port Tewfik is the end of the Canal. Along this beach, where one can find prehistoric hippopotami, fossilised vertebræ of sharks and ruins of the Ptolemaic fortress of Clysma, the Company has built bungalows and a casino which tries to exist on the last shillings of travellers from Cairo and the first rupees of those on their way to India. Large colonial houses, their front rooms darkened by overhanging wooden balconies, have been put up along the Avenue Hélène, an asphalt road.

The last house belongs to the Commandant of the Port, a former officer in the French Navy, who has been appointed by the Company to supervise the transit of ships and their entrance into the Canal. The names of the ships, their tonnage, the number of passengers, the pilots' names, in brief, the daily record of Suez is announced here on a huge

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blackboard. It is like the register of the greatest hall-porter in the world. At the end of the Avenue Hélène there is nothing but a broad stream of light and a point stretching out into the sea, on which, resembling the stone finger in a final warning, stands erect the memorial to the Armies of India.

PART FOUR
THE MARITIME ROUTE
(continued)
CAIRO

FROM SUEZ TO CAIRO

THE road leaves Suez at the spot where the Red Sea ended in the fifteenth century. The sand is still as fine as that on the ocean bed, but large lizards and scorpions have replaced the turbot and soles. The lizards have retained fishes' orange ocelli on a grey background. In the light sky, blue as the sacred scarabs, the clouds imbue the sun with a reddish hue. The track and the road, the one red and the other black, cross and recross like the twisted trail of a drunken cyclist. The track is marked with white stones by a roadman, Petit Poucet, and the road is merely a crust of asphalt on the sand. The railway and the telegraph indicate the direction of the road and the track.

The sand alternates with the rubble. On the heights, the octagonal watch-towers of old quarry stones, perfectly pointed, receive and then dismiss the travellers. The Khedive Ismail's castle rises in the enormous expanse of sand half-way along the road—this was one of his spendthrift follies, because he never lived in it. When they are in love, the diplomats of Cairo go to this empty palace which seems to be under some curse, and picnic here by moonlight amongst the bats and chameleons.

Finally, from a crest in the road the end of the journey is in sight; a valley incredibly green—the Delta of the

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Nile—spreads itself before one. In the foreground is white and rose Heliopolis, Cairo's new suburb, and near by is Almaza, the most beautiful airport in Egypt. Aeroplanes descend on this square plot of desert which is surrounded by a white paling. The outlines of the landing-ground are exactly indicated by trenches of fresh flowers and iridescent sand; and when they land, aeroplanes are shaken by its airholes. From these planes Cairo is visible in the misty Nile valley below. In the dusk, the pyramids emerging from the fiery glow of the dust seem to be moving away from one another and from the minarets which pierce the heavy greyness. A gaping hangar devours the aeroplanes of the *Misr*, piloted by officers wearing the tarboosh. Branches of jasmine weigh down the custom-house shed. The yellow reserve cars of the Shell Company have red wheels, and look like corollas against the mass of sweet-peas, larkspur, delphiniums, snapdragons, sulphur and pink gladioli, all summer flowers which have blossomed here since March. Passenger monoplanes, with tiny wheels not larger than a plate, and landing chassis lighter than the feet of a stork (for a plane must be very light to take off from the sand) are leaving the military aerodrome. The monoplanes raise their tail-planes like wagtails and fly over the gay green flags, with the crescent and white stars, which are stiffening in the desert breeze.

THE OVERLAND ROUTE

THE road which I have just described was taken by Moses, by Cleopatra, by pilgrims to Mecca and by the messengers who brought to Europe the news of Dupleix's and Warren Hastings's victories. It was the *Overland Route* of the unfortunate Waghorn, who gave his fortune and his life in 1829 to prove the usefulness of this road to his country. It was the track used before the railways, when six passengers from the P. & O. liners journeyed from Alexandria to Suez in ten days, and crossed one hundred and forty kilometres of desert in waggons with two large iron wheels. The P. & O. Company had a concession to transport goods and passengers as far as Gibraltar, then as far as Suez and finally as far as Bombay. The P. & O. entrusted the Indian mail to old English coaches which jolted uncomfortably. At night the horses often lost their way, for the path was difficult to find, and silently sank down into the quicksand. Help had to be fetched from a distance of ten kilometres, and even caravans rarely passed silently in the moonlight. At each stage of the journey, during the day, travellers distracted themselves by drinking black coffee; they were pleased to meet even Bedouin families or to see the bones of dead camels who were still in harness. When the travellers reached Suez they were given a glass of water with which to wash themselves, and a bottle of bad beer with which to quench their thirst.

THE ROAD TO INDIA

In the eighteenth century England had not become a Mediterranean Power: English merchants in Alexandria used French names; and from 1763 onwards, England was trying to digest French India, that enormous pudding, and Egypt did not interest her. But about 1768 the Ottoman Empire began to disintegrate under the blows inflicted by Russia. All of Europe realised that haste was necessary if profits were to be derived from this situation, and England was in a greater hurry than anyone else. Accompanied by an armed yawl, two *East Indiamen* anchored at Suez; the Sublime Port protested, and the governor Pasha of Cairo was angry, because heretofore he had considered it clever and lucrative to rifle the luggage of Englishmen travelling through Suez. Despite his objections, however, officers and civil servants, their dispatch-boxes under their arms, now left Suez every week on camels for Alexandria. Letters from London took only sixty-five days to reach Madras. The journey round the Cape of Good Hope was out of date. Maps of the Red Sea and the desert were published in England; merchandise from Bengal was unloaded openly at Suez.

And the French, who for two hundred years had tried to draw profits from this route, lagged behind. England no longer feared them, for the Revolution had broken out in Paris.

The desert is full of mirages. On the twenty-fifth of December, 1798, the Overland Route witnessed a most extraordinary one.

It was the apparition of a French General, surrounded by a General Staff consisting of scholars, naval officers and a rear-admiral. Bonaparte stopped beside an old acacia tree.

THE OVERLAND ROUTE

The branches were covered with ancient clothing which pilgrims had hung there as votive offerings after their return from Mecca. Bonaparte held the Koran on his knees and meditated : what was he asking of Mohammed ? He was demanding the domination of the route to India.

Suez, crushed for centuries by artillery, was only a mass of miserable fishermen's huts and old Venetian boat yards, a thoroughfare without water, without even a brackish spring. Bonaparte did not stay there. Accompanied by de Berthier, he galloped on towards the north, his bridle loose, in search of the Pharaohs' canal. He found the sandy dams and followed them to the Bitter Lakes, that ancient gulf of the Red Sea which the Jews crossed when it was dry, but he could not trace the exit to the old canal. Taken by surprise by one of those terrible and sudden tides of the Red Sea, the group of Frenchmen would have perished if Bonaparte had not remained calm. He placed the caravan round the group, chose six guides, who went out, like rays from this centre, and sounded the depth of the water at various points. He thus discovered the only safe road to follow. At Suez he investigated the improvements of the port, and the possibility of equipping a Red Sea fleet. He also considered the course of the future canal to the Mediterranean. When Bonaparte returned to Cairo, he offered an alliance not, as might have been expected, to his neighbours, the Pashas of Damas and Saint Joan of Arc, but to the Indian Sultan of Mysore, Tippo-Sahib, England's mortal enemy.

" You will have been advised of my arrival at the shores of the Red Sea with a large and invincible army. We are filled with the desire to free you from England's iron yoke," so Napoleon wrote to the Sultan.

CAIRO, THE CENTRE OF THESE ROADS, THE CITADEL, THE CENTRE OF CAIRO

I AM sitting on a bench, my feet dangling above the city, my head resting on the rocks of the overhanging wall. I am leaning against walls of the dervishes' monastery which clings to the stone as plants cling to the cliffs on the shores of Moqattam. This small monastery dominating Cairo from its pergola and the two garden terraces is a cool retreat, the grottoes are quite cold. I do not know whether the Turkish Bektashi dervishes who live here were once howling or dancing dervishes, but I soon discovered that they no longer howl or dance. They know that modern Governments disapprove of these fantastic gymnastics. On the way up to my eyrie I could see them through the glass doors of the small Louis XVI pavilion under which a staircase leads to the main entrance. They were sound asleep, stretched out on a beach-like mat and looking like large Cetacean whales. Their amber rosaries had fallen from their fat fingers, and the flies which decorated their faces took but little notice when a dervish opened one eye and removed his tarboosh of white felt in order to scratch himself with it.

"May Allah keep you," the Brother at the gate had said to me, "and make you prosperous so that you

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can continue to give me alms for the rest of your life. . . .”

I had come here to have a view of Cairo and the citadel. Cairo has three colours : the red earth of Libya, the yellow sands of Arabia, and the black mud of the Delta. The Citadel is the key to lovely Egypt, this country of happiness which the dead, full of regrets, must contemplate for ever through the eyes so charitably painted by the living on their sarcophagi.

From the height of my dervish monastery I can see three sides of the honey-coloured Citadel, an enormous stone building which has proudly resisted the pressure of the crowd. It is the home of the Mameluk oligarchy of fifty-three princes which was in power for three hundred years in the shelter of these large rectangles flanked by cylindrical watch-towers similar to quick-lime ovens.

The Citadel is in the style of Genghis Khan. Saladin, the glorious Sultan of Egypt, the man who defeated Richard the Lion Heart, built the Citadel on the site of an ancient edifice which was called the Castle of the Air. He had ascended the mountain, leaving in his trail pieces of decomposing meat. The Sultan later stopped and built his fortress on the spot where some of this meat, instead of decaying, had been smoked by the air. This was in 1176. Since then, the Turks, the Mameluks, the French and the English have established themselves in this fortress. Whoever controls it, dominates Cairo, and thus Egypt, and therefore the road to India.

Behind me is the chalky yellow peak of Moqattam, the undisputed capital, where the ancient sacrifices to the sun were held. There are more old shells on this summit than on a beach. The inexhaustible stone belly of this

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mountain has produced Memphis, Heliopolis, the Pyramids, as well as the early settlements which were the Egyptian Babylon and later developed into Cairo : Fostat, the City of Tents, Al Katayali, and finally Masr-el-Kahirah, Cairo, the Victorious City, and her Citadel.

From this great height, the city seems to be going down to the Nile to drink. Like a storm photographed at the height of its fury, the dimly outlined plots of ground, this beauty of the Orient, surrounding the Citadel, seem to swell, to jostle each other, to lick the points of stone, to sink down again under the sub-foundations and then to die at the feet of the houses.

This roofless city is cut through, as though with a razor, by many terraces. From this distance, the houses appear to be cubes covered with white dots, but in the suburbs they are salmon pink, among tufts of dusty green, the colour of bitter aloes, of unwashed cypress and of eucalyptus. Everything is reduced to squares, even the mosques lacking that spherical heaviness so characteristic of Constantinople seen from Eyoub. The only pointed objects in sight are the minarets, but they are slender and indistinct ; the only curves are the trailing smoke which disappears again quickly. Two large expanses of desert, the colour of date-matting, and forgotten no one knows why, divide the city and rise, thrusting aside the houses, to the heights of the Griffon vultures. These birds glide along on the warm air current and then, their beaks pressed forward, let themselves drop into the filth below. One can hardly see the Nile ; the river seems to exist only to emphasise, with metallic flashes, the subdued darkness of the sand. Beyond the palm-grove, which alone betrays the presence of the Nile, the perspective of pyramids in

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the plain of Ghizeh resemble a row of tents. Behind them aeroplanes wheel and rise to meet the sky, and that is the end.

Cairo is African and Asiatic, born like the Sphinx of a union between the lion and the ram ; of savage Africa with practically no history, whose past is unknown, and whose chaos is barely integrating, and of agricultural Asia, vast storeroom of past glories, religions and systems, a dusty heap of ancient bones. Cairo is the threshold of Africa where black blood is filtered slowly into the Mediterranean so that this sea will absorb only a few drops of it at a time. This is so useful, says Gobineau, to our artistic genius ; but the Sphinx looks towards Asia.

CAIRO, THE TOMB OF THE MAMELUKS

DO not stop to look at monuments, to admire ruins : there is nothing much to see. These relics belong to the dead. Here is a road lined with houses which have been pulled down to the first floor and are yawning chasms, without ceilings, and a tomb forgotten in some corner. In one part of this district, a cupola with stone mouldings, a minaret with an ornamental design, mark the end of a style, the decadence of those foreigners who ruled Cairo for several centuries, and who, by their fanaticism, their insular morality, their insurrections, their crimes, and their bravery, for a long time closed the Indian road to Europe.

Nothing definite is known about these Mameluks except their slaughter by Bonaparte at the Pyramids ; they are a people lost in the crumbling debris of a dead city. They were the handsomest representatives of the Caucasian race ; blond men with blue eyes, the type always loved in the Orient. These Georgians, these Mongolians, these Circassians were reduced to servitude by the Tatars and sold by them to Saladin after the terrifying advance of Genghis Khan. In the thirteenth century they were military slaves trained for war. They reached Egypt in time to revive the disintegrating succession of the Caliphs, and they at

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once began to raise their new country to the highest rank.

In their capital, "three times as large as Paris", Jehan Thenard in 1512 admired the Mameluks, their white gowns and their green headgear.

The houses are paved in marble according to Venetian fashion [another traveller writes], the streets are straight and covered with arches, under which merchants sell chopped meat, cooked on small spits, like larks. . . . there are shops where one can buy snow as though it were sugar . . .

(Snow reminded the Mameluks of their own country and they brought it from Syria by relays of fast horses.)

Frescobaldi, a Florentine, wrote in 1389 that one saw more ships in Cairo than in Genoa. Caravan loads were transferred to thirty-six thousand boats, which were continuously at sea, and India's entire trade passed through Egypt in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Cairo was for two hundred years a second Baghdad and, according to a recent theory, the actual scene of the *Arabian Nights*.

The Mameluks had defeated the Arabs with bows and arrows; the Turks, in turn, crushed the Mameluks with guns. Like Don Quixote these last feudal lords were contemptuous of artillery, "the arms of the indolent". Their Ottoman conquerors massacred some of them in 1517, but authorised the survivors to organise an army corps, doubled their man-power with auxiliary troops, and sent the most distinguished among the Mameluks as princes to govern the provinces of the Empire.

These Aryans lived in Egypt without being assimilated. To the end of the seventeenth century, they continued

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their race by sending to Caucasia for slaves of their own blood. They considered race so much more important than religion that they called themselves indiscriminately Christians or Mussulmen. They were the sole aristocracy of this people of *fellahs* and of Copts; the Egyptians travelled on mules, but the Mameluks rode on horseback.

Volney, who so successfully studied an Arabian manuscript in the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, has left us some delectable pages about these horsemen in dressing-gowns who galloped along on Syrian stallions, their legs covered with huge breeches which came up to their armpits, and were ornamented with fur even when the sun was warm. They wore boots of yellow leather and they were heavily armed with carbines, pistols and scimitars, which they wielded with a savage upward sweep. Galloping along, they shot off the heads of damp cotton plants and flung their pistols over their shoulders when they had fired.

These Mameluks formed magnificent hordes, without morals, discipline or organisation. They were mad, mystical bands of free-booting Parsifals, the last eccentric and absolutely unique offshoot of the white races. They were proud, and never accepted payment as the pure Circassians did; they allowed their women to grow fat in the harems, and combined the most primitive barbarism with that degenerate artistic taste which gave birth to the decorative style still known as the Mameluk style.

The Turks were driven back all over Europe: before Vienna, at Lepante, in Poland, Moravia, Hungary. When the Sublime Port weakened, the Mameluks again dominated Egypt and remained in control until the arrival of the French. As compared with this European Army, they showed themselves to be what they really were, a race

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forgotten by history, one of the many anachronisms of Ottoman decadence.

The Mameluks who survived Bonaparte's invasion were unable to resist the first modern sovereign of Egypt, Albanais Mehemet Ali, a prince so eager for progress that he wanted to demolish Antinoe and use the old stones to build a sugar refinery. He invited the Mameluks to the celebrations at the Citadel, held on March 11th, 1811, in honour of the investiture of his son, and exterminated them all on that one afternoon like vermin. These feudal gentlemen, who, in the nineteenth century, were still hunting falcon, continued to fight when each was surrounded by twenty soldiers, and to hurl javelins made of palm-tree branches, which weapons accorded with the simple tradition of the Khan of Tartary, but have no place in our modern world.

It was Volney who taught me to love them. Gobineau, that unerring guide, confirmed my opinion.

"They did so many things [he writes in his *Trois Ans en Asie*], they left so many monuments which are lasting and beautiful. In all of Asia they alone, they and the men of India, knew how to cut marble and stone. The memory of the Mameluks dominates Cairo."

That is why, during the week when the dead are honoured, I shall pay a visit to their curious tomb.

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INGENIOUS historians enjoy emphasising the importance of chance, of fortuitous accidents in Napoleon's life. This is the little arbitrary game of *if*: if Nelson had not failed to find the French fleet transporting our army to the expedition, there would not have been an Egyptian Campaign. If, on his return from Egypt, General Bonaparte had been taken prisoner by the English, Emperor Napoleon would never have existed. And what would have happened if, at Brienne, he had decided to join the navy and not become an artillery officer? . . . what if he had entered the service of the Turks? . . .

What to me is really remarkable about this man is the extraordinary unity of his life and his destiny; what is striking is that, at the very beginning of his career, as a little second lieutenant of sixteen, he should have studied the possibility of attacking the "tyrants of the high seas" by taking possession of Suez, the key port, and that, at the close of his life, at Saint Helena, he should have said: "The English were frightened when we occupied Egypt, for we showed Europe how India could be taken from them."

Napoleon always wanted to humiliate England by attacking her in India. He followed this objective con-

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sistently : in Suez in 1798, in Central Asia in 1800, at the Cape in 1805, in Afghanistan and Persia in 1808, by the plan for a Franco-Russian expedition against India which he negotiated with Paul I, by his alliance and his friendship for Alexander I, and perhaps even by his expedition to Russia.

During the Directorate when, in a secret council, an invasion of England was discussed, Bonaparte was opposed by Rewbell and La Réveillère, but supported by Talleyrand, Napoleon said very plainly : " England is vulnerable not in London but in India." He already saw the route to the Cape abandoned, " the Mediterranean a French Lake," and Egypt a French warehouse, dominating world commerce, " a huge bazaar where the world meets ".

For this reason, on May 19th, 1798, he embarked with his expeditionary force. In passing, he took Malta and the treasures of the Order : seven million in coffers, diamond-studded shrines, and gold ornaments from the churches, which, melted down in crucibles, paid for his army supplies. He dodged Nelson, who was looking for him feverishly but arrived everywhere too late, at Malta, Crete, Alexandria and Syria.

As soon as Bonaparte had landed, he sent a reassuring message to the timorous and peace-loving Pasha of Cairo, a conscientious administrator.

" The French do not wish to make war on either the Turks or the Mameluks [Bonaparte wrote]. All they want is to forge a road through the territories of these peoples so that they can go to India and attack the English in their Indian business offices."

The Mameluks, however, loved battles, and stationed six thousand men on the western banks of the Nile to

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prevent Napoleon from passing. This was the Victory of the Pyramids: two thousand Mameluks were slaughtered; on the French side barely forty men were killed and two hundred wounded, and that evening, at Boulaq, the looting was terrible. Our soldiers robbed the corpses of Egyptian soldiers who had carried their money in notes in their belts, or "fished for Mameluks" with crocodiles in the Nile. They took *douras*, caftans and carpets; seated round their camp-fires, they put on turbans, fur capes and waistcoats embroidered in gold. All that night from the third to the fourth Thermidor they looked for the treasures of Murad and his large white camel "which was carrying several million".

"Go and see the Pyramids," Bonaparte had said to Vivant Denon when he landed. "One does not know what might happen."

What happened was: the naval disaster at Abukir, first direct blow inflicted by England; then the alliance against France she fomented in Europe, England's knock-out blow, which she delivered despite the second Abukir, where, as Bainville so well expresses it, "By a victory on land Napoleon counteracted the overwhelming naval defeat", and this despite the miracle, so typical of Napoleon's career, that his plan for the organisation of Egypt had been as perfect as though we had intended to settle there for eternity. What finally happened was the loss of Napoleon's conquest and the defeat of our hopes in Egypt. "England has destroyed everything, my plans and my dreams," Napoleon said at Saint Helena.

Night is falling on the Pyramids. A Turkish crescent

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moon shimmers in a sky as green as the Prophet's standard. The new main road uniting Ghizeh and the Nile cuts through the plain like a line of fire. Cairo, dominated by her cliffed shore, catches fire at the horizon. A French mist descends on the river and the plains resemble those beside the Saône.

A forest of eucalyptus and pine trees, which Napoleon never knew, has grown up in front of the Pyramids. Men drilled wells and found water twenty-five yards below the surface, and irrigated and transformed the desert into an oasis. Couples are waiting for their dinner to be served under the orange- and the grape-fruit trees, and bougainvillæas hang down on to the coppered top of the pergola under which the orchestra is playing. The hibiscus lends a tropical crimson note to the early European vegetables; the scene is a luxurious confusion of shadows under the trees; the atmosphere is happy round the large fish-pond of clear water surrounded by flagstones which are still warm.

Through the window-frame I can see the enormous Cheops. The pyramids of Ghizeh are a part of that large family of three-dimensional geometry which extends as far as the Sudan, and surrounds Cairo with implacable landmarks. The Sphinx, laid bare to the sub-foundations, is no longer strangled by a necklace of sand; she now extends her huge leopard paws to the sun, dappled with the shadows cast by its rough-hewn outline. Since the foundations of the Sphinx were laid bare, one can see that this is not really a statue but an interpretive rock. That is why it is so very beautiful, and the stratifications of these calcerous layers provide the natural and eternal seats for this watchdog of the road to India.

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AT first sight the English are invisible, absorbed in the mass. But when one studies Cairo through the triangle Nile-Moqattam-Ezbekieh, one can see the four points of their influence : two are strategic, the Citadel and the Nile barracks, and two are psychological, Shepheard's Hotel and the Residence.

For almost a century, Shepheard's has been an English relay station on the road to India. On the pavement tall, handsome dragomen, servile and yet insolent simpletons with silk scarves round their necks, lounge about in pistachio, salmon-pink or canary-coloured robes which accentuate the slackness of their gait. They play with bamboo canes while they wait for their customers. The Americans have spoiled them. A few years ago, at Luxor, one could see them, lying in wait for their prey, wearing golden shawls like those worn by the negroes of Tiepolo, and cerise silk peeped out between the two rows of shining buttons on their frayed cuffs. The depression has somewhat sobered these dragomen, but when they offer their services, they are still plaintively urgent : " Remember, lady, my name is Moses. . . ." Undoubtedly this is what Loti calls " the charming oppression of Islam ".

The caravans from Suez stop at the shores of Lake Ezbek, now transformed into the gardens of Ezbekieh, and officers

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of the Indian Army go to the New British Hotel, in the European quarter, which is cordoned off. This hotel, built on the site of Bonaparte's stables, is not quite as old as Shepherd's. The French prefer a more modest establishment, the Nile Hotel, managed by a former provincial comedian. Flaubert stayed at this hotel in 1850 when he was collecting material for the *Tentation* at the fancy-dress ball in the road of Wallachian brothels, and for *Salammbô* in the scented bazaars. . . .

Conscientious tourists, relieved to have seen Sakkarah and Ghizeh during the morning, deposit their thermos bottles and their binoculars, and quench their thirst under the broad awning at Shepherd's Hotel. The hall beyond the entrance is furnished in old Cairo style: there are lamps shaped like mosques, lattice work of carved wood, low divans, secluded corners behind heavy curtains, cathedral windows and a smell of lozenges from chilly seraglios.

Will Monsieur Baehler, a charming old Swiss, the prince of Egyptian hotel managers, one day publish his memoirs? I hope so, because forty years of Egypt have passed before his monocle. He received Marchand, the commanding officer, at Shepherd's when he arrived from Fashoda; Kitchener and Roosevelt were his friends; Lord Milner and Lord Lloyd asked his advice; Stanley signed his golden book in 1890; Louis Barthou spent his holidays in Switzerland with him; he was Loti's guide when he was in Egypt.

"Do you know," he said to me, "that Kléber died in this room which is now my office? He had invited himself to lunch with Colonel Damas, his chief of staff, who lived here in the Hotel, close to the general staff headquarters. Kléber came from his palace at Ghizeh, the former

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residence of that unfortunate Murad Bey. After the meal, at which there had been a great deal of laughter about the caricatures of the Five Hundred which had been passed from hand to hand, the General left the table without waiting for his coffee, and went with Protian, the architect, to walk on that terrace over there bordering on the ancient cistern. The assassin remained hidden. He leapt at Kléber and stabbed him to the heart. The murderer was a Syrian fanatic, who had been promised that his father, then in prison, would be pardoned if he killed the French General. For a month the murderer had been prowling about the town. He was impaled, and the three sheikhs from Cairo, who had known about this plot but had not informed the authorities, were shot. Kléber sank down beneath that ancient sycamore tree. I dug up that bit of lawn said to be the spot where Suliman hid in a cistern, and I actually found the old cistern."

The British Residency is guarded by dragomen so bronzed that they are like the dogs of Fô at the gates of a Chinese temple ; and the Governor is waited upon by a troop of *kavas*, wearing beaded silk waistcoats. Thus the Residency presents that mixture of civil ostentation and military display, that atmosphere of the royal enclosure at Ascot in Haroun al-Rasehid's Palace, which has such a salubrious effect on Oriental natives that Lyautey adopted this setting for Morocco at once. When the Duke of Connaught once left a reception given by a British Governor, he remarked smilingly : " Now, at least, I know how a King of England should live."

The memorable and yet tragic events which determined the destiny of Egypt were enacted at the Residency : here and in London the Anglo-Egyptian negotiations were held

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in 1920, 1922, 1924, 1927, 1930 and 1936. These negotiations alternated with riots. Much has been said in the press, this winter, about the students' revolt ; perhaps they have been taken too seriously. True, these disturbances have embarrassed the Residency, but the Residency is not the Empire. To understand the real importance of these riots, they must be regarded from the more far-reaching point of view of the enormous net of imperial communication and the safety of the road to India.

Cairo does not protect the Suez Canal. The real base for English defence is higher up, at Alexandria, Marsa Melruh and Ismailia. The British could, therefore, without any great inconvenience, give the Egyptians the pleasure of evacuating their capital, if Cairo were not at the cross-roads of Egyptian thoroughfares, including, above all, the road to the south, to the Sudan.

Anyone who has lived in a very dry country knows the conflicts connected with irrigation, those quarrels, occurring " in the hour of drawing water ", which involve the entire population. A man who digs deeply into the cunning subterranean source can cut off his neighbour's water-supply. In an oasis, everything depends on a well ; in Egypt the dams are essential. The Nile, which the Egyptians call the sea, reserving for the other the name of " salty sea ", inundates the country twice a year. This domestic catastrophe is sufficient for the grain harvest, but it is not enough for the cotton first planted a century ago by Mehemet Ali, because cotton needs water all the year round. The dams have been built to ensure this water-supply. The Egyptian soil is very thirsty, but its annexe, the Sudan, which is naturally barren, but has been

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reclaimed and laid out in cotton by the English, is even thirstier. And the Sudan is given water first, because it is nearer the source. The Nile resembles a rubber hose-pipe ; if anyone steps on it at the other end, the garden near the sprinkling rose goes dry. And from Cambyses to Kitchener, the masters of Egypt have all moved higher towards the spot where the water flows into this hose. That is why, in the name of Egypt, England took the Sudan, and now governs it by an Anglo-Egyptian Condominium.

The Nile is a trunk with two roots, one white and the other blue. They flow together at Khartoum. The White Nile is calm and has a network of natural canals and reservoirs such as Bahr el Ghazal or Bahr el Jebel. The White Nile is lazy, stopping in her course to receive the milky waters of her tributaries. Alone, the White Nile could not supply Egypt with water.

The Blue Nile, on the other hand, is swelled by deluges from the tropics and the melting snow from the Abyssinian mountains. The water content of the Blue Nile is sometimes increased from two hundred to ten thousand cubic yards in a second, whereas the White Nile never exceeds eight hundred cubic yards. The Blue Nile, therefore, arrives first, in a turmoil, charged with mud, and heavy with putrefied material. She overflows, covering the plains with fertilising water. After this first flood, the Blue Nile grows calmer, giving way to the White Nile, which overflows six weeks later.

Egypt needs these two Niles, these two rivers in one bed, these two mothers. One of them nourishes the country, while the other quenches her thirst. Every year, the benefits of the Nile are distributed by means of

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larger and still larger dams. Assyut, Isna, Sennar, Jebel Aulia, Assouan, are terraces of water. The first, at Assouan, is the pivot of England's power. From here, if she chose, she could either dry up Egypt, or flood her with torrents of water.

The White Nile gives birth to large equatorial lakes : Victoria Albert and Nyanza ; the White Nile causes England, to whom these lakes belong, no anxiety. But the Blue Nile comes from Lake Tana, and, emerging from a canyon, the river falls from a height of six thousand feet on to Tisarate among a mass of hippopotami, crocodiles, tortoises, and gold washers belonging to the *tribus gallas*. This is only about three hundred kilometres away from Roseires, the Sudan frontier, but these three hundred kilometres are Abyssinian territory and therefore Italian territory. Is it necessary to add that anyone owning Lake Tana controls the chief tributary of the Nile ?

England, whose foresight is proverbial, is often accused of greediness, but she showed no wish to conquer this very inaccessible Abyssinian region. England believed that a peaceful penetration would be sufficient, and she was therefore satisfied with an agreement signed with the Negus in 1932, according to which England undertook to build two mysterious roads from Addis Ababa to Lake Tana, and from the Lake to Roseires. No one was allowed to approach these roads, mentioned in the Maffay report recently made public. These roads represented only a very small part of England's far-reaching plan ; she wanted to gain control of Africa's entire water-power from the mouth of the Nile to Limpopo, and to construct, at Lake Tana and at Lake Victoria Albert, water-towers ten times as large as the one at Assouan. She hoped to make navig-

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able the pestilential marshes of Central Africa, to irrigate and reclaim vast waste territories and to force them to contribute to the progress of humanity and civilisation. England, in other words, wanted to create a fantastic Empire which would extend from Alexandria to the Cape and from Tanganyika to the Indian Ocean.

To-day, however, Marshal Badoglio occupies Lake Tana, and one can almost say that he was led there by the English.

Formerly, to establish the balance of power between the Mahdi and the French, who had just entered Tunis, England herself, in 1890, made room in Eritrea for Little Italy. The results of this action, forty-six years later, are very serious. The conquest of the Ogaden desert means that Eritrea and Italian Somaliland have been united, and British Somaliland is wedged between them. In itself this is a matter of local annoyance only, but the annexation of all of Abyssinia, and the possibility that this occupation may be extended to Libya, may mean that Egypt and the Sudan, thus surrounded, would create a most serious situation for England.

And this—the security of Egypt and the route to India—has always been defended by England with impressive perseverance and tenacity.

In sixteen years of war and coalitions, which almost killed her, she defeated Napoleon.

The liberation of Greece, a pretext for the occupation of the Ionian Islands, provided the naval base necessary to her in that emergency.

The energetic policy she adopted during the July Monarchy enabled her to drive France, whose conquest of

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Algiers and Tunis she had been unable to prevent, out of Egypt.

From the end of the eighteenth century to the Congress of Berlin, she defended the Ottoman Empire, stone by stone, against the Slav advance, for this Empire was the gateway to the Eastern Mediterranean.

By the Crimean War, and a wise diplomacy in the Near East, she kept the Russians away from the road to Constantinople, to Persia and the Levant.

During the Second Empire she fought with all her strength against the excavation of the Isthmus at Suez, but having lost the first round, she won the second by buying the Canal.

When she was startled by the unexpected arrival of Colonel Marchand at Fashoda, she leapt forward, ready to declare war on us, and she did not think that she was paying too dear for our retreat when she abandoned Western Africa as far as Lake Chad.

From the beginning of the twentieth century, she always stopped the Germans on the road to Baghdad.

When, during the Great War, she lost her control of the Sublime Port, she replaced this influence by her ascendancy in Arabia, where she created Palestine and Irak.

In brief, on the eve of the Ethiopian expedition, the security of the road to India had been established at the price of tremendous efforts which had persisted for centuries.

These efforts inevitably call to mind Lamartine's prophetic utterance :

"England would prefer a century of wars rather than the surrender of the keys to Suez. . . . Suez is and will remain the gateway to her enormous Indian Empire, and for this reason she cannot afford to have this gateway closed to her without

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fighting unto death: England will do anything to keep the richest and vastest empire politics has ever conquered. . . . Egypt is Suez, Suez is India, India is England. Before any other power could dominate Egypt, she would have to annihilate England. And that is difficult. . . . One would not be able to take Egypt from England, and, if one did, one would not succeed in keeping this country."

THE OLD CAFÉ

I SIT in one of those old Moorish cafés which thrilled Gérard de Nerval when he arrived from Marseilles as a reporter for the *National* with his camp-bed, his dark spectacles, his daguerreotype and his Arabian dictionary. This old Oriental café has not changed since 1843 ; it is close to the poultry market and smells of burnt onions. On the shelves at the right there are platters of reddish copper beaten by hand. They resemble the sinking sun in the desert, on an evening when a sandstorm is raging. On the shelves at the left, long-stemmed pipes hang opposite *hookahs* with amber mouthpieces, and the tubes, covered with old and greasy velvet, are like Mercury wands encircled by serpents. On the ground there is a brazier filled with sombre red embers which glow as the smokers breathe into it. Two large cauldrons of embossed yellow copper, containing the water for the coffee, stand on the counter beside carafes filled with greenish and bilious-looking syrup. The tables are bare except for glasses of water (nothing is prettier than a glass of water in the sun ; it is so white beside a cup of very black mocha coffee).

This old café at Cairo is situated on the street corner, and its welcoming doors open so wide that the walls seem like gable-ends. The benches facing the pavement are made of sycamore wood like the flat saddles of mules,

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and like them, these benches are worn by the rubbing of many backs. This café, wedged between a cooked-meat shop and a tarboosh-cleaner's establishment, is crowded with domino players in the evening, but otherwise it is deserted. The bottle-washer is asleep in a corner; he knows many stories and he tells them when he is in a good humour (but never the tales from the *Arabian Nights*, because that is unlucky). He is asleep on an empty chicken hamper, under the photograph of Zaghloul the Liberator, the father of the Wafd. With their backs to him, two Delta peasants are munching pistachio nuts. Their tattooed fingers burrow into the bag, their black nails split the shells, and as they chew they spit on to the pavement. *Fellaheens*, one eye blue from antimony salt visible in a triangle of silk veil, are passing, and so are lower-grade Coptic officials, disfigured by more pockmarks than there are spots on the skimming ladle of an itinerant merchant selling fried foods. The two peasants stretch out their legs, inhale the smoke from their *hookahs*, and let their stomachs rumble most horribly; then they cough and sink back again into a state of stupor. . . .

Time passes gently. The motor-cars hoot in vain, because the Arabs have not yet learned how to cross a road properly; the horses beat their hind-quarters with nervous tails, and men wipe their faces with red and white mosquito-chasers. Are these people unhappy? The *fellahs* in blue cotton, astride on their mules, balancing Turkish slippers, or the boatmen, whose features are clear cut, asleep in their boats along the canal, or the old women with golden reels on the base of their forehead which make them squint, who are reading fortunes from tea-leaves in the café, or those blind men singing and accompanying

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themselves on Sudan tambourines or on mandolins, old instruments from the days of the Pharaohs, or the young girls whose palms are already red from henna oil—are all these little people depressed because they are not ranked as equals by the League of Nations? Do they really suffer when they see the Tommies drilling in front of the barracks at Quasr-el-Nile, or is this merely an invention of students, politicians and journalists? Is the photograph of Zaghloul which decorates the green-distempered wall of the little café the expression of a profound desire for liberation?

England and Egypt—this is an old marriage. Their disputes, their quarrels, their reconciliations reflect a permanent relationship rather than a serious disharmony. Their relationship is an example of that eternal issue: “I can’t live either with or without you,” an issue experienced by most people who are joined together. Egypt wants to be free. But is the cotton merchant willing to pay the heavy duty of his blood? Would the *souks* artisan rather turn out shells or have them aimed at his own head? Would the *fellah* be happier without these strangers? Would he pay less for his water? Did he have enough water before the English came?

And outside Egypt? Our world is no longer the world of 1882 when every nation had a place in the sun. To-day there are rejuvenated and powerful nations who might easily acquire territories discarded by others. The British occupation consists of two thousand officers who bring in more than they cost, whereas the French occupation would have consisted of a hundred thousand civil servants. An Italian occupation would mean two million Calabrian peasants and Sicilian workmen. . . . To defend

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Egypt against possible invaders more than an army would be needed ; an armed nation would be necessary, as well as the necessary time to mobilise a vast force which would include Turks, Arabs, Coptics, Bedouins, Syrians, Armenians, Kurds, Jews, Indians, Maltese, nationals all more or less protected by European countries, who would hurry to their consulates at the first rumour of Egyptian mobilisation. . . . Would this responsibility not finally rest on the *fellahs'* shoulders ? Egyptian students demand their country's liberty, but is Egypt, at the bottom of her heart, willing to pay the price ?

As a foreigner, I asked myself this question in the old café.

PART FIVE
THE MARITIME ROUTE
(*continued*)
THE RED SEA

A Q A B A

BETWEEN the Arabian mountains and the desert which is the frontier of Egypt, a longitudinal hollow unites the Dead Sea with the Red Sea, and the little port of Aqaba is situated at the southern opening of this depression. The other mooring-grounds are Tor, where pilgrims to Mecca are stopped by the quarantine, Yambo, Wejh, Jiddah.

Aqaba is almost opposite Suez ; the city (if one can call it such) is situated at the tip of the left ear of this Sinaitic peninsula which, on the map, looks like a jackal's head.

Aqaba attracted the most remarkable adventurer among the crusaders—Renaud de Chatillon, who in 1182 loaded a fleet of ships from Syria on to camels' backs and brought them to the Red Sea. Lawrence, alone, conquered this town with five hundred cameleers, and this, his first strategic success, caused the General Staff in Cairo to take him seriously.

To-day Aqaba is mentioned in the Anglo-Egyptian negotiations and in the newspapers. If, in 1968, the English are unable to renew their lease of the Canal, they will transform Aqaba into a second Suez, a rival enterprise. In the Wadi Araba valley, a natural depression, they might build a second canal from the Red Sea to the

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Mediterranean. With dredging machines, and petrol to exterminate mosquitoes and to establish refrigeration, this undertaking would be less difficult than the digging of the Suez Canal, a task which was so arduous and so tragic.

At present Aqaba is not fortified. It is a fishing village on three frontiers: Egypt, Transjordan and Palestine. By car, it can be reached from Suez in two days. The first day's journey is infinitely monotonous. One drives along the road chosen by poor pilgrims on their way to Mecca, when they trudged along without water or food, across the great desert of Tih. Many of them died on the way. From the height of the Milta Pass few living things are visible for a hundred kilometres, not a tuft of grass, not a bird, not a fox. Lizards are the only reminder of life. In the distance, the only vegetation one can see is a sort of horsehair, black from the blight and growing irregularly: it is the barbed wire left behind in this outpost by the Great War.

At the left, the road to Palestine has been unusable for a long time. The village of Nekhl, proud of a brackish well dug eighteen yards below the surface of the ground, is still far away. There is nothing for travellers to do but to gaze at the immensity of space or to dig out the tyres of their cars when they sink into the sand after the clutch has been used.

The next day, after a night spent in the open or in a resting-hut provided by the Egyptian Government, the descent to Aqaba is more cheerful. The high plateau declines until, finally, through the sharp points between mountainous rocks of brilliant red sandstone pierced with holes of fire, one can see the shimmering surface of

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the Red Sea, covered with a halo of intermittent bluish mist.

At the bottom of bare gullies filled with mineral waste there are queerly shaped blocks of stone and pieces of rock piled high by the fierceness of the wind. The chains of mountains on seven or eight levels are of very different colours ; salt-white, beige, the shade of mud, red like camel's meat on the hook of a butcher's stall, or black as an extinguished furnace. The range looks more like enormous steps of pebbles than like mountains. In the distance, the last of these mountains fades away into a mauve and salmon-coloured haze. But one cannot help gazing at those ravines from which no parapet separates us, a formidable landscape made of huge walls set so close together that loose boulders cannot roll to the bottom, and so remain jammed between them over the precipice. These enormous splinters of stone, these arrow-shaped ridges solidified in the intense silence uninterrupted either by the rushing of a waterfall, or the cracking of tree-trunks, are strangely sinister. Only a black eagle circles over the scene. The massive red rock is streaked with green veins, and the loosened boulders are as heavy as copper ingots.

At this shore of the Red Sea where no boats or houses make the U-shaped beach seem alive, the sharks end their long journey begun at Madagascar, Sumatra or Australia. The little Arabs plunge into the sea shouting to frighten them away, but Europeans, tempted by thought of a bathe and yet frightened, remain in the shallow water, and sit down and stretch themselves as though they were in a bathtub. They are ashamed of their ridiculous behaviour and yet reassured, for they know that sharks cannot

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turn round and bite unless they are in water at least three feet deep. Some of the pebbles on the beach are of red sandstone, tiny fragments of those mountains at the end of Egypt called the Lip Mountains, which rise from the plain like luminous climbing trees. There are also pebbles of white limestone, little bits from the sea, broken pieces of coral, from which the limestone has been washed away by the waves, and some deck-bolts. A side wind, a kind of violent mistral sweeping down from the mountains, skims the surface of the water.

In front of the square guard-house at Aqaba, a small whitewashed building, the six sottish men of the garrison sit motionless, squatting on their heels, "true sons of patience". While they drink their Bedouin coffee, smelling of bitter apples, they watch a patrolman saddling a camel which is trying to bite him.

The charm of Aqaba lies in the little harbour where no ship enters; this fishing port, where no one fishes, with only two boats; this beach covered with greenish mother of pearl shells, with spiky corals; these orchards with shady palm trees, their branches hanging over the earthen walls, half tumbling down and touching the water; these gardens heavy with early flowers, where, even in the winter, juicy tomatoes, vegetable marrows and cucumbers abound; the old Turkish fort, split open and wrecked by some unfortunate explosion, like an old powder rifle which has been too closely packed.

Shall we one day see Aqaba black with smoke, blue from petrol fumes, while motor-cars plough through the streets? The British Army, suspected of having built an aerodrome in Aqaba, uses the beach as a landing-ground. If, as is reported, capital is already being invested in Aqaba

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because possibly the road to India may be diverted, and land values are rising, it is probable that for a long time there will be no returns on these investments but the fruits of the orchards, where the palm branches hang above the sea.

JIDDAH, THE PORT TO MECCA

JIDDAH is as white against the low reddish coast as a tooth piercing a gum. Ships are anchored out at sea, because the coral reefs make it impossible for large vessels and difficult for small craft to land closer to the shore. The *samboucs* have already been hurried alongside the steamer so that the cargo, huge cases suspended in clusters from cranes, can be unloaded ; for here everything is imported. Dragomen from the consulates come alongside in motor-boats to get the choice foods ; sausages, Camembert cheese, Canadian apples, Egyptian salads, Chianti and crème de menthe . . . that is they fetch them if the port officials are willing to give them up. Then the loaded *samboucs*, following a zigzag course along the reefs, return to the shore. Bending over the side of the boat, the boatman gropes his way by watching the colour of the green transparent water, for he knows that the depth of the sea is indicated by various shades of green. Where it is deepest, the water is a deep pure jade ; near the surface it is spotted with white, a *gras-de-mouton* jade. Despite the boatman's agility, the boat sometimes runs aground on a reef. Then the man jumps into the water, and tries to push off the keel, while his fellows stand ready to ward off the many sharks, which have been roused by the advent of a large vessel. That is what the port

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of Jiddah is like when a ship arrives. Nothing has changed since the days when Gobineau described it.

Passengers disembark in the little port and then enter the town under an arch to right and left of which the tall houses seem to be falling into the sea. Jiddah is completely surrounded by a wall. In the north, there is a gateway to a fashionable beach where the inhabitants walk and chatter in the evening. The eastern gate, closed in principle to Europeans, opens on to a large square which is always crowded, for from it travellers leave for Mecca and Central Arabia. The other beach, south of the town, is hot, evil-smelling, and covered with rubbish. Here the new-born puppies, dying of hunger, cry out, for although Moslem law does not allow the faithful to kill animals, it says nothing about feeding them—especially animals as impure and useless as dogs.

Jiddah's most attractive feature is her houses. Lawrence compared them with Elizabethan dwellings, because of their pointed gables ornamented with Gothic designs. These Jiddah houses have several floors; in shape they are square or rectangular, and they are whitewashed so thoroughly that one needs dark spectacles to look at them in the sun. In these houses there are large apertures with wooden shutters which can be moved together so that they are half-open during the day, and entirely closed in the evening. Naturally, there are no panes of glass in these openings. The carved wood, charming in colour and design, comes straight from Java. The houses have only one low door with folding panels of carved wood.

In the morning Jiddah is very busy. The *souks* amuse the public by the variety of objects they display. These goods, imported from all parts of the world, are not

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manufactured solely for the tourist trade, as are those sold in the bazaars of Port Said or Panama. In Aqaba, the commodities offered for sale are made to suit the tastes and the needs of the inhabitants: silk gowns and gold belts from Syria; large Madras handkerchiefs embroidered by hand which the people in Jiddah wear round their heads, Arab cloaks, from heavy goat or camel-skin coats for nomadic Bedouins to those made in finest cashmere in exquisite colours. From Shiraz, across the desert, caravans bring carpets, tapestries and cushions. Porcelains and decorative objects arrive from the Far East; carved woods from Java; brasses and leather goods from North Africa. Europe sends household ware, gramophones, sewing-machines, clocks and so forth—all the luxuries used by wealthy families in Jiddah. Apart from the *souks* there are auctioneers who, several times a week, cry out their wares, and one can sometimes buy lovely old carpets which the owner is selling merely so that he can buy new ones.

From one o'clock until four, when the heat is intense, everyone rests in Jiddah. Though the sun is never as relentless as it is in Africa, it sucks up the clouds from the Red Sea, and this humid heavy air is very exhausting. The inhabitants' faces and their clothing are always damp. A white moisture quickly covers boots and travelling-cases. During the day the fresh air cannot penetrate into the town; but when the sun sinks the atmosphere is somewhat less stifling. At about five o'clock the shutters are opened and the male inhabitants—not the women—leave the town by the northern gate and walk on the pretty beach of fine white sand. This beach is about a kilometre long; then it gradually declines into the sea.

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None of the inhabitants of Jiddah ever thinks of bathing. A few of the gentlemen in the district have horses, but the beautiful animals from Nedj waste away in Jiddah, because after they have galloped along for a few metres they are dripping wet. Arabian mules are the most common mounts. They are almost as large as our own mules, but more graceful. These Arabian animals are delicately built, and quick on their small feet ; their coats are pure white or mother-of-pearl grey ; their bushy manes are henna, a lovely orange shade, and so are their hoofs. Towards evening the stables are opened, and they trot out alone, or with children on their backs, and go down to the beach to trot about. Standing firmly on his legs, one of these mules will watch you approach, his large sombre eyes filled with malice, and if you put out your hand to touch his soft muzzle, he will wrinkle his nose, turn back his ears, move aside quickly and lash out at you. Later, when they are leaving the beach, the children and the animals run a race ; the mules pretend that they will let the youngsters catch them up, but then they always escape to pick an invisible pine or chew a branch of a dwarf tamarisk tree, which is as colourless as the sand. For no green leaf is visible in the outskirts or in the town itself. These mules, agile, restrained and resistant as they are, can, if necessary, march eighty kilometres in one night, from Jiddah to Mecca, and the pilgrimage season is no holiday for them.

In groups, or frequently in twos and holding each other's hands, the fat young men from Jiddah walk slowly along the beach in their gold-embroidered robes of pink, mauve or pistachio green silk. Naturally, no women are seen on the beach, for they are confined severely to the harems,

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where they are not even allowed to play gramophone records of male voices. They go out only on Fridays ; when they walk to a long rectangular plot of ground, surrounded by white walls. In the centre there is a small cupola which covers a small rock. Here, according to legend, Eve, who had found Adam again on the sacred mountain of the Meeting, died and was buried close to the sea. The women come on a pilgrimage to this spot, chatting together and rubbing their stomachs against the sacred rock so that they will conceive. As they breathe little fresh air and take no exercise, many of them are pale, anæmic and fat, for even in their own homes they move about very little. Servants bought by families who pledge themselves to feed and treat them well, look after the household.

The walkers return from the beach when the brilliant sun sinks across the sea and the sandy sky turns a golden greenish hue, extraordinary in its beauty. When the last green rays of the sun have disappeared, the deserted beach is suddenly grey and dull, and the pointed faces of jackals appear in the dunes.

One evening, we saw in the distance a group of men moving slowly but rhythmically along the shore and into the sea. Their heads were small, their shoulders bent, their long legs thin, and they were huddled so close together in the darkness that we could hardly distinguish one from another. They stopped, separated, dispersed, and then we realised that they were a group of large pink flamingoes on their way to the town in quest of fish offal. . . .

In ordinary times, Jiddah is quiet, sleepy and practically deserted. The town seems too large for its population.

JIDDAH, THE PORT TO MECCA

Actually it is too large, for Jiddah lives on the pilgrimages and awakens only when the pilgrims arrive. Then it is as greedy and as bustling as a beehive in the summer. The houses are cleaned ; the inhabitants wash their mats and their carpets in the sea ; houses built to accommodate six people are made ready to receive a hundred. The *souks* unpack black coral rosaries and dried fish for the Javanese, and birdseed for the people from the Sudan. Money-changers take out their coins ; the owners of animals brush down their mules and camels.

The arrival of the ships bringing Mussulmans from all parts of the world is imminent. Already, during the journey, several incidents usually occur on board these old boats crowded with carefree passengers ; a fire has broken out, there are quarrels, and premature confinements. The Captain in charge of a pilgrim steamer must be a strong and energetic man, familiar with every trade.

The inhabitants of Jiddah take charge of the travellers, and their departure for Mecca is organised slowly because foodstuffs, prayer rugs, and good mules must be purchased for the pilgrims and their followers. The men ride on mules or saddled camels ; the women, draped in robes as black as the Kaaba itself, sit in huge baskets attached to the sides of the camels. These baskets are covered with cloth, humble relics of ancient palanquins.

Jiddah, the gateway to Mecca, now swarms with people day and night. Men of all races and conditions jostle against each other, rob each other, are unable to understand one another . . . Persians, Turks, Afghans, Russians, Moroccans, Tunisians, Algerians, Abyssinians, Albanians, Egyptians, Kurds, Senegalese, Somalese, Bosnians, Siamese, Malayans, Cretans, Serbs, Javanese, Libanians, Cypriots,

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Chinamen, all the human races, men of all colours of skin and hair, all the people from the gates of Vienna to Polynesia who have been converted by the Turks or the Arabs during the last thirteen centuries, send representatives to Jiddah.

By the time the pilgrims leave, some of their savings have been taken from them. When they return, they are completely impoverished and usually disappointed, but they never admit this fact, for they are glad to have acquired righteousness and they look forward to impressing their families with accounts of their journey. Some of those who were not wise enough to buy a return ticket cannot get home. They apply to their consulates for repatriation, but the free passages are limited and they are forced to linger in Jiddah. That is why, at least until quite recently, forgotten pilgrims, waiting for three years to return to their homes, could be seen idling in front of the consulates. They live "round the edges" of a household, sleeping in the passage; they are thin, lame or blind, and earn a little money by performing small jobs. They are addressed by their first names followed by the name of their country: Abdullah Pnoi (de Pnos), Ahmed Biskra (from Biskra), etc. . . . One day, when they have forgotten that they intended to leave, it is their turn to be sent home. Are they sad to be going? They say nothing and, like children, always seem content to move; they depart, their feet bare, seated on an old rug at the back of a *sambouc*, and the boatman, holding the rudder between his naked toes, steers the boat alongside the steamer.

THE INDIAN MAIL

I AM on an English steamer, ten days from Paris. The ship's tonnage is small and there are no tourists on board. The passengers are civil servants, business men, babies, the wives of officers, infinitesimal parts of the Empire. The routine on board, with five meals a day, resembles life in a small Devonshire village, except that the church-tower is a mast and the municipal alderman an officer at the wheel. On Sunday, at the same hour as in England, the same hymns are sung; in the evening the same game of whist is played after dinner, the men drink the same beer. I am the only foreigner on board, and from my easy chair I can observe this little world.

The most striking thing about these people is their team spirit. If they have any preferences or personal antipathies they do not mention them. They stand together. A great deal has been said about the French spirit of anarchy; nowhere is this spirit more apparent than on ships. Bitter tribal wars separate the passengers on our boats to Indo-China; the passengers are deeply concerned with the seniority of civil servants, the precedence at table, the evening calls in the cabins, or the rolling of the vessel.

"It is not wise to urge passengers to take part in general amusements on board," the purser of our best boat on

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the Egyptian line said to me the other day. "Last month we were chartered by a Swiss athletic society for a Mediterranean cruise ; it was marvellous. When we announced that ' a fancy-dress ball would take place at ten o'clock ', old ladies from Interlaken and big industrialists from Zürich appeared on the stroke of ten, wearing paper caps. You could never make a Frenchman do that."

I am seated in my corner, and the other passengers glance at me rather coldly. Their famous English phlegm helps them to conceal their nervousness, but to overcome this uneasiness they speak loudly and quickly, change the subject rapidly, and gesticulate. Whether one leaves the initiative to them, or ventures to address them with their own traditional remarks about the weather, it is always "Lovely morning, sir". We ridicule this ritual, because we are not aware that by his speech an Englishman reveals his birthplace, his social status, his old school and even his profession. "Very fine indeed, a bit cool." In five words, an Englishman has placed his questioner.

I therefore wait patiently, and gradually all of my fellow-travellers speak to me for various reasons : because I am a white brother and not one of those more or less dark-skinned untouchables whom they ignore on the deck ; because they want me to know that, being a Frenchman, I am their immediate neighbour and, like themselves, a member of the Great War and the *Entente Cordiale*. (An ex-serviceman is the first to speak to me ; this generation is almost entirely francophile : let us make haste to profit by this fact !) Then a professor comes over to me because I am an intellectual : he is twenty-eight, from Oxford, a pacifist, an anti-imperialist, a member of the Church of England, and he objects to changing for dinner. He must

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belong to the October Club, now three years old, which has chosen as its motto : " We will not fight for King and Country."

The bridge players at the bar are friendly, though I am not playing, and the children come over to me, all looking very blond next to the black-skinned Bengalese servants. My love of animals, furthermore, obliterates some of our differences. The ship's cat, a tail-less creature from the gutter, miserable on this vessel where there are no gutters, becomes my friend and so do the five charming Army horses who live in open cabins on the second-class deck. These horses are entirely covered with linen garments. At last, having passed the final test by showing my athletic prowess at throwing rings made of cord into an old bucket, I have been accepted by this little village, floating on the high seas, the unchanging if not motionless home of the British race.

THE ITALIAN STEAMER

AFTER breakfast we noticed a ship behind us. At first we saw only trailing smoke at the horizon.

Our P. & O. steamer, the blackest of all the English greyhounds of the sea with curious names which travel between Bombay, Karachi, Alexandria, Marseilles and Plymouth, forges her twisted path through the Red Sea, and her long hull, lying low, is immersed in the water up to her breast-strap.

Towards noon, the ship behind us is in sight ; we can already distinguish her prow ; the foam makes it look like a painting in gouache.

The P. & O. continues on her route. If she has noticed anything, she does not show it. She is the worthy heir of the *East Indiamen*, those rapid sailing vessels of that naval amphibian of the Victorian Age, when sails were still used from the jib and the jigger on both sides of the high funnels. The ship knows that she is classified in every port, that the best pilots have been chosen to serve her and that a vigilant police force is safeguarding the many privileges and monopolies of the British courier and the Indian Mail. The ship is fully conscious of these things, but when coffee is being served, the little black spot at the horizon has become a steamer, and her bridge is visible against the sky. She is an Italian vessel.

THE ITALIAN STEAMER

The passengers on the British steamer are now resting in the breeze between the air-shaft and the ventilators. The nursery is bustling with activity. The smoking-room with eight shuttered windows opens on to an expanse of deck which reminds one of a lawn, and the wind raises the glazed chintz curtains, as it does in a real cottage. The chairs, made so that one can lean back in them and read *Country Life*, the bridge tables, everything in the room in fact, is like a "desirable residence in Devonshire, fourteen miles from the station, period wood carvings and fireplaces, twenty bedrooms and one bathroom", as the advertisements say. The orchestra is playing out of tune, the ship's cat passes, indifferent to the people who stop to stroke him (why do the English, who are so reserved, make advances to two things which escape them so completely, music and cats?). Under the large awnings of this wandering circus, some ladies sit reading novels by the Baroness Orczy. The P. & O. steamer, in the meantime, vibrates, bends forward, spills the water in her swimming-pool on the port side, and tries to remain ahead of the Italian boat. . . .

Yes, but by tea-time she has caught us up.

She is the only vessel on the high seas which does twenty-one knots. One cannot help noticing her; she blocks the view of the horizon; she is powerful and new. I went to see this ship last year in Italy and I know her well. She is the chief ship of the Bombay-Trieste line. Every cabin has a bathroom. A swimming-pool and a cinema have been installed on board, and the best Neapolitan ices and fruits are served. The Maharajahs like this new toy which takes them to Europe in ten days. There are a great many airshafts and ventilators on this Italian steamer.

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Even in the tropical heat, refrigerators, evaporators and thermotanks maintain an atmosphere as cool as that of an autumn evening. This is so pleasant that the passengers cannot make up their minds to return to their cabins, and for a little while they lie down on the tables in the dining-room, where the air is cold and conditioned.

The P. & O. steamer's searchlights are turned on. The boys cover the deck with chalk and for the evening the quarter-deck is transformed into a dance hall. The night falls after the sky has produced some effective shades of green and orange. The Anglo-Indian ladies appear in evening dresses which have been seen at many garrison clubs. The English ladies walk very quickly round the deck, much to the surprise of the fat Indian women, so like towers of silence. These Indian women are as heavy and as old as our women of sixty. The gentlemen drink *Scotch tea*, that is to say whisky, at the bar ; they are glad that the deck is quiet at last and that the children have disappeared for twelve hours.

Everything would be splendid on this floating bit of England, if a new constellation had not appeared in the darkness : the stern lights of the Italian ship which passed us in the night and which will reach Bombay three days before we do. . . .

THE OIL TANKERS

MOST of the oil tankers are English. Their hulls are filled with red oxide of lead, and petrol of the *Anglo-Iranian* Company which they transport by way of Haifa or Tripoli ; with petrol of the *Anglo-Persian* shipped by way of Abadan ; of the *Anglo-Egyptian*, shipped by way of Suez. The funnels of these steamers are at the stern, and this gives them a slanting appearance ; they resemble tug-boats. Their entire propelling machinery is centred under a raised forecastle not unlike those on ancient caravels. One might say that these tank steamers are turning away their heads in order to avoid the bad smell under their noses ; or perhaps they are being thoughtful about the enormous increase in the world production of petrol since 1859 . . . ? The ventilation facilities on these ships have been doubled, like supplementary lungs, and they proudly carry along their tanks filled with precious liquid, just as a capitalist parades his stomach. They are widened at the prow, and their white bridges dominate the sea.

Smoke issues from one of the tank steamers, and the desert wind, carrying smoke and sparks along with it, seems not to worry about the danger involved. The steamer is hurrying to bring new life to tanks, lorries, aeroplanes, to all the machinery which, without her, would

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be silent and still. The oil steamer is the tyrant of the seas, because crude oil or benzine are the sinews of war. As they pass, these tankers are regarded with religious respect.

The entire world is busy quenching the thirst of Ethiopian lorries; the *British Tanker*, an object of interest to the Intelligence Service, brings heavy loads from Persia, while the Swedes convey the motor-fuel necessary for aviation from the U.S.S.R. and Rumania.

Last summer I visited a petrol king. Half-smiling, this calm and yet passionate man made several relentless remarks, quoting treaties and secret agreements. I wish to mention only one of his utterances:

"France," said the Trust King, "has a large army which is entirely mechanised. Well, when the critical moment comes, you will have enough petrol to last you exactly two weeks."

This means that, in case of war, without the domination of the high seas, that is to say without the alliance with England, our modern armaments would be as useless as a heap of old iron. Our synthetic petrol, alcohols, benzols and other motor-fuel which might replace petrol cover only 6 per cent of our consumption. Is there much chance that we shall succeed in discovering substitutes when Germany has only produced half-measures (40 per cent)? We have not yet been able to construct a branching pipeline from Havre to Paris; and there is no use discussing the building of huge reservoirs large enough to store our war stocks in the *Massif Central*, for this is a dream which may not be realised until the year two thousand.

I was thinking about these facts this evening as I watched

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the petrol and benzine tankers sailing down the Red Sea, while the narrow cables disappeared at the horizon. Here, looking like silver trinkets against Rockefeller's waistcoat, are the reservoirs of the Shell Company.

Occasionally an oil steamer meets some of her comrades on the way to India ; she encounters other tankers from the *Standard Oil*, the *Asiatic Petroleum*, the *Burmah Oil*, the *Mantacheff*, the *British Tanker*, the *Vacuum Oil*, the *Steaua Romana*, the *Deutsche Petroleum*, the *Texas Company* or the *Insulinde Tanks*. The ships belonging to these lines are old hands at transporting mineral oils, some of which are as white as water, while others are as black as coffee. These tanker fleets feel contempt for the amateur vessels, hastily equipped, which the Abyssinian War made necessary everywhere. On the decks of these Greek, Maltese or Syrian ships, oil drums are badly stowed away, and the boats may run aground, because their crews are unfamiliar with the currents along the Eritrean reef barriers which the ancient Portuguese humorously called the "open eye" and which, this winter, transformed the Red Sea into a naval cemetery.

Nations without petrol comfort themselves by conveying it to others who have none ; that is why the Japanese are the Swedish freighters' most important customers, for the oil produced in the Sakhalin petrol regions is not sufficient, and Japan is dependent on the added supply from Batum.

The Swedish and also the Norwegian oil steamers can be seen everywhere but in Stockholm. The Swedish tankers travel round the world for years without returning to their home port. The Captains' wives are on board, and these ships are like Swedish homes, except that the

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walls are not made of wooden moulding and that, at the doors, there are no snow-shoes ready for use.

When I went through Suez, I saw a Swedish tanker with the standard hoisted in honour of the Captain's marriage. This man, who travelled between Italy and Persia and had two hours in Suez, had asked his bride to come from Stockholm. A beautiful blonde appeared on the bridge; the sun of Aden had not yet spoiled her complexion. She was now the mistress of the crew, and she would command the ten or fifteen sailors on board this heavy cargo boat. The vessel, deeply submerged in the sea, would plunge ahead with difficulty on her heavy stomach. I said ten or fifteen sailors; our own eight-hour day has forced our merchant marine to live on taxes, and French shipowners must employ thirty or forty men on oil tankers of the same tonnage. We have a hundred units, the American and the English ten times as many, and yet we have only the eighth place.

One day, at Port Said, I watched from above while an oil steamer was being prepared for her journey, for after every voyage the tanks must be cleaned because oil fumes collect in them. The entire crew had disappeared, and the ventilators were silent, though usually their hurricanes sweep from one end of the ship to the other to prevent spontaneous combustion. The air-reservoirs used on the deck as isolators were empty. At the place where, on other ships, the bridge and the saloons are situated, I saw two deep square shafts going down to the store-rooms; these were the vats for the petrol.

Then an ambulance drove up; some men came on deck carrying a large negro whom they had pulled up from

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the ship's hold. The black man was pushed into the painted wagon.

"That is the third since this morning," the foreman grumbled. "The fool has been knocked out, but tomorrow he'll be on his feet again. These heavy petrol fumes go to the cleaners' heads and they are overcome."

"Why don't you give them gas masks?" I asked.

"They have masks, but they won't use them. They like it. The petrol makes them drunk."

I thus learned that the gases stagnating at the bottom of the reservoirs turn the men's heads; they jump about, burst forth into voluble talk, and laugh hysterically. Petrol not only makes millions of coins dance; men, too, dance when they smell it. As soon as mad laughter rises from the shafts, the ambulance is called. For, suddenly, a silence follows: the workman has collapsed, dead drunk. If he is not brought up and given medical attention at once, he cannot be saved.

FROM THE RED SEA TO THE INDIAN OCEAN

THE Red Sea is shaped like a bottle which is emptied out into the Indian Ocean by the neck. This neck is the straits of Bab-el-Mandeb, in Arabian, "the passage of the afflicted". Sheikh Saad dominates the straits at one side, Perim at the other.

Sheikh Saad, which occupies a key position, might have become a French Gibraltar. At the moment it is difficult to say to whom the town belongs. The history of these one hundred and sixty-eight thousand hectares of land, with coal deposits, subterranean springs, with strategic and commercial possibilities, is strange and almost incomprehensible.

In 1868 two merchants from Marseilles purchased in the most regular manner of an Arab chief, whose right to the property cannot be contested, the territory of Sheikh Saad with its peninsula, said by the pilot to be worth eighty thousand *thalers* (about four hundred and thirty thousand francs). The French flag flew over this town, which is still shown in our atlases as a French possession. The British Admiralty maps, too, call it a "French barracks".

The Sublime Port protested against this transfer of land, and for more than thirty years the French Government could not decide whether or not to assume ownership.

RED SEA TO THE INDIAN OCEAN

In the meantime the Marseilles buyers had failed, and were willing to sell Sheikh Saad for the ridiculous price of two million. Strange as this may seem, however, no one was interested, even when the town was put up for auction. No one wanted Sheikh Saad, neither France, nor Italy, nor England, nor Spain, nor Russia, nor Austria, nor even Germany. Sheikh Saad remained a kind of no-man's-land. To-day it is within the frontiers of Yemen, but it really belongs to us by virtue of the old rights which have never been abandoned. Nevertheless we saw some English torpedo-boats in the harbour. It would not be surprising if England soon interprets the presence of her ships as her right of possession.

As for Perim, this island is dreaded more than any other garrison by English officers. Yellow seaweed, like that in the Sea of Sargasso, and the backbones of sharks are the only objects which ripple the surface of these frontier waters between the dry and the humid heat, between the equatorial clouds and the blue sky, between the Arabian sun and the Indian monsoons. The English took over this island in 1855, their pretext being the looting of a British vessel.

I am sorry for the two destroyers I saw anchored near the petrol reservoirs. The destroyers were concealed in a corner of the last bit of headland, as motor-cycles are hidden at the end of a street of bad repute. Black rocks rise from the yellow beach; the tops of the rocks are so pointed, so abrupt, as it were, so finely chiselled, that they are as clear as though seen through powerful binoculars. No tree is in sight; apart from the eucalyptus trees at Ismailia, there are none between Marseilles and Bombay.

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For two weeks I have seen no shadows on the earth except those cast by rocks or by human beings. No coloured turbans can be seen. The natives, who once lived in Perim and traded in Sudan slaves which they sold to Mecca or Hodeida, on the Arabian coast, have gone, and men in khaki uniforms have taken their place.

Before me lies that waste coast of south-eastern Arabia where the flora consists of balsamiferous shrubs, which stupefy or excite the nervous system. It is as though Allah deliberately planted soothing drugs in the sad barrenness of this hard, dry earth, so drunk with its own essence, which Ptolemy wrongly called "happy Arabia".

This is the country of incense and the Queen of Sheba of the Hadramaut, which is so little known; the country with mysterious cities of skyscrapers and occult potentates who are not Arabian princes but native millionaires owning offices, plantations and palaces as far as Singapore.

I glance once more at the sea which I am leaving; the Greeks called it the Eritrean Sea, that is to say "red" (a vague etymology according to which a certain Erythras, King of Persia, claimed his rights by another route). If Warmington is right, the Persians were responsible for these Greek voyages, because Darius had instructed Scylax, the Greek, to sail round Arabia and to enter the unexplored sea by Bab-el-Mandeb.

It seems strange that the Greeks, those great navigators, never wanted to travel to India except by land, along the Greek roads, which were the scene of the retreat of the Ten Thousand and of Alexander the Great's expedition, and which we still use to-day. Nevertheless, after his victories in India, Alexander seems to have considered embarking at the mouth of the River Indus and travelling

RED SEA TO THE INDIAN OCEAN

to Greece by the sea route. If he had carried out this plan he would have crossed the Indian Ocean, then unknown to the Mediterranean peoples. He would thus, four hundred years earlier, have made the discovery which distinguished Emperor Claudius's reign : and he would have discovered monsoons.

This natural motive force, these winds, which recur periodically (*maussim* means season in Arabic) coming from the south-west in the winter and from the north-east in the summer, double the air currents and are strong enough to push forward native boats. Naturally the monsoons were a real treasure. Indians and Chinamen, Arabs and Egyptians, profited by these winds for centuries ; but the Orientals could be silent ; they kept their secret from Europeans, and the Greeks, who never sailed beyond the dangerous cape near Bab-el-Mandeb and the reefs at Socotra (Marco Polo's Necromancer Island) were unfamiliar with monsoons.

When the Arabs had lost the navigation monopoly of the Indian Ocean, they tried to acquire a monopoly of the Red Sea. They introduced heavy toll charges and the Red Sea became increasingly inaccessible at Bab-el-Mandeb. Even Byzantium, fond of commerce but not of naval wars, paid tribute so that her vessels might pass. The overwhelming number of Mohammedan conquests in the seventh century closed the entire Red Sea to Europeans, who then disappeared completely from this second Mediterranean, which was saltier, contained more fish, was more tepid and bluer than the Mediterranean proper.

The fact that, eight centuries later, Europeans were able to return from the south, by the route round the Cape, was due to the achievements of the great Portuguese admirals.

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But in 1538 the Turks finally drove out the Lusitanian caravels, and passed a decree forbidding Christian ships from passing Jiddah, by then the most northern point on the sea route to India. This sea, so frequented to-day, was dead for centuries ; it was as void of sails as the sky above it is cloudless. The sea's phosphorescent nights, when sparks flare up on the surface like the last flickering lights of some great ball given under the water, were illuminated only when the bows of pirate ships or the keels of pearl-fishers' boats cut through the waves. The Red Sea's basaltic islands, remains of ancient volcanoes, and her coral reefs born of the sea, Shadwan, Jebel Zukur, Jebel Teir, the Zebayra, or the Islands of the Twelve Apostles, on which a lighthouse is the only landmark, are deserted even to-day.

The Turks repeated to all Europe the legend that the Red Sea was an inland and sacred body of water, closed to all infidels, and menaced by sinister plans to attack Mohammed's tomb. Their fear of losing Egypt was concealed behind this mystic argument ; but the route could not be barred with impunity to the forces of the West. Just as vaporous fumes, moving about in a cylinder, try to get out, the pressure in the Red Sea made itself felt with more or less leakage, until the Suez Canal was opened. On that day the force of European commerce burst open the lid and, thrusting apart two continents, forced its way between Asia and Africa.

DJIBOUTI

I HAD not been in Djibouti for ten years. I know that the Abyssinian War has made of it a curious meeting-place for photographers, members of the Red Cross, spies, traders of doubtful character, crinkly haired dignitaries, thick-lipped generals who have escaped with their lives, and even for dethroned kings. Djibouti is a kind of *Port Maillot* crowded with men selling second-hand aeroplanes, damaged in accidents, and with agents offering old rifles for sale. The picturesque aspects of the town will not last. As soon as the Italian-Abyssinian war is over, Djibouti will again sink into its usual torpor. More than that, the peace will be a catastrophe, because it will prove our inability to develop Djibouti into a strategic military town on the route to India, or even into an important town on the main road to Abyssinia.

Perim was occupied under our very noses by the English; the Suez Canal was opened; we needed a base in the Red Sea; one of our naval brigs bought Obok for ten thousand *thalers* from some Denkalis chiefs who promised that if the harbour could not be made into a port another would be given us. That is how, thirty years later, we acquired Djibouti. It took us ten years to transform it into a coaling station, where our ships could refuel on

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their way to India, and half a century to derive any benefit from our acquisition of 1858. When everything was ready and in working order, towards 1910, coal was suddenly replaced by fuel oil. Djibouti waited another quarter of a century to adjust herself to this new situation.

I am not sure that she has been properly adjusted even now. I was assured that during the last two years it has been possible to refuel our steamers and our warships at Djibouti; but this is not quite true, actually they go to Aden. A commission, appointed in 1924 to investigate the establishment of a fuelling station, has taken twelve years to do nothing. Having moved heaven and earth, the Navy now hopes to accomplish something by 1937.

There were hardly any roads to the sea in Ethiopia; the Blue Nile, gushing forth from Lake Tana and flowing towards the Sudan, was like a torrent; the Italian road from Massawa to Assab leading towards Eritrea was considered impassable, and the southern roads towards British Somaliland and the ports of Zaila and Berbera, and the roads to Italian Somaliland, were not much better. Abyssinia's approach to the sea was therefore confined to the railway from Addis Ababa to Djibouti.

This road, begun in 1897, was expensive for the shareholders, and the enterprise had to be refloated by French taxes in 1909. The actual use of this thoroughfare began in 1917. To make it a paying concern, however, especially when the depression began, the largest possible number of clients had to be attracted to Djibouti, which became a free port where goods in transit were duty free. But Frenchmen, protectionists as they are at heart, have a horror of free ports. In spite of the promises made in 1925 to Ras Tafari, Djibouti has never been easily accessible.

JIBUTI

It is not a gracious port where foreign ships anchor with pleasure on their way to India to buy, sell or to bond over their goods. This resourceless colony prefers to maintain a miserably balanced budget by levying two or three per cent *ad valorem* duty, collected from the five hundred and ninety-two vessels entering the port every year.

It is not difficult to predict what will happen : when the war is over Djibouti will be merely a transit harbour. To-day, when a new age is beginning at Addis Ababa, the Italians will ship Abyssinian products by way of Massawa in the north, or Mogadiscio in the south. Then we shall be left to settle the accounts of a Djibouti which is really dead, though it has a Residency, three aeroplanes, and negresses who perform such pretty stomach dances for travellers from the Far East.

ADEN

ONLY six months ago, Aden was merely a small harbour. When ships had been refuelled or re-coaled, or when they had recruited Lascar labour (the only men able to resist the heat of the Indian Ocean), the steamers disappeared again quickly behind Steamer Point, sailing towards Karachi and Bombay along the parched shores of Yemen. Some of these ships, true to the ancient tradition, sailed towards the coasts of Malabar, southern India and Madras. One British dispatch-vessel guarded the military rock and the white native city situated behind a crater-like salt deposit. That was Aden during the last few years.

Once I stopped there when Aden was a port of call. I was with some French people, who were in a hurry to return to Marseilles, and they went on board again as soon as they had seen the famous cisterns. This last time, however, I let the boat leave without me.

I was finishing my dinner when we arrived in Aden. The steamer slowed down, escorted by canoes in which naked young negroes stood upright, wearing white tufts of ostrich feathers on their heads. The passengers were enchanted by this sight; they felt that at last they had discovered the Orient, the Russian Ballet of their dreams. I went on deck; to my great surprise I saw the horizon

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brilliant with a thousand lights and wondered who had set fire to this extinct crater. The port was shining with innumerable crescent moons, distributed horizontally; searchlights were playing on a group of negroes filling the coal bunkers. These men looked as though they were in hell. Bluish and sepulchral gas tubes were stretched out on to the quay; clusters of electric bulbs illuminated the gangways; above, mingling with the night, I could feel the presence of that motionless and colourless mountain which rises like a curse at these cross-roads of the world.

Suddenly the sky caught fire: an explosion of light sprang from a thousand sources. Twenty searchlights, diverging and then converging, once more swept the stars, and I knew that once again, as in Alexandria, I had surprised the British Fleet at work. Luminous spherical lines rose everywhere, from the masts, the fortifications, the piers, the water, the sky. This exquisite blue brightness was reflected on every object it touched: on the smoke, the masts, the funnels, the roofs. I had not experienced a scene so completely submerged in light since the nights of the Zeppelin raids; I was impressed to see how the electric current, older now by twenty years, had gained in strength, especially in this tropical darkness.

These fiery scissors, apparently obeying an invisible force, suddenly closed, met on a star, as though in search of something: then I saw a squadron of planes more than six thousand feet above me; the phosphorescent bombing planes were attacking. . . . The fleet tried to ward them off with arms of fire, just as a man awakens and brushes off mosquitoes. The aeroplanes, however, continued to fly over the port and to drop bombs, which were covered

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with parachutes and resembled confectioners' bombs wrapped in lace paper.

The next morning I was roused by commands issued in a raucous voice: the British sailors were drilling underneath our windows. The non-commissioned officers, leaning on their canes, had barking voices, so characteristic of this *drill* (a severe word which does not exist in French, and which is a cross between the words exercise and training), and the bluejackets were marking time. I went out on to the terrace where the Somali servants, their heads draped in sinister white, were still asleep. They reminded me of exhumed Lazaruses lying on a high reed bed.

Aden is awakened and sent to sleep by a clarion call. The town is a conglomeration of colonial houses—the most modern bungalows are made of wood, the older houses of white stone—but all of these dwellings are dominated by semaphore signals. Canteens, barracks and hospitals have been built on the slope of the hill, and between these buildings there are tennis courts, drill-grounds and cemeteries. Strips of green, not allowed the living, have been planted round the graves. Hairpin-bend roads, bordered with pebbles whitened by the heat, lead up to the blocks of reddish-brown lava, which look like huge rock buns pitted with black raisin-like holes.

But the port itself offers the most unexpected spectacle: the one prolific little dispatch-vessel has given birth to warships and destroyers. During the last six months warships have been arriving from everywhere: from Ceylon and Singapore, from the naval bases in the Orient, from Seychelles and Zanzibar, the southern bases, from Suez and the mother country. The Vice-Admiral's standard is flying from the *Norfolk*; she is as white as

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a yacht. The numbered destroyers point towards the straits and, beyond them, towards the high summits of Abyssinia. . . .

When day broke, the warships ceased to wink at each other, and signalled with flags instead. Above them, there were black avalanches, caught in the hollows by the last storm which occurred four years ago. New batteries had loomed up, and I realised that—as is the case on each station on the road to India—mobilised Aden considered herself to be in a state of legitimate defence. The coaling post I formerly knew has been suddenly transformed into an Indian Gibraltar.

Old Aden, like a barrack stove
That no one's lit for years and years.

I have searched in vain in Kipling's "old stove" for the only flower growing in these crevices, which is pompously called the lily of Aden. There are no flowers here except Japanese chrysanthemums, and they are imitation. These imitation flowers compete with the sword-fish, the panoplies of assegai, the stuffed mermaids with large breasts, and these ornaments are liked by the hotel clientèle who consist of spies, smugglers, colonels dressed like scouts, who shake dice in a leather cup, colonials nursing their cirrhosis of the liver in the bar, Dutch or Paraguayan physicians with the Red Cross, armament merchants and crestfallen journalists from Addis Ababa.

In the street one sees another floating population; naked and very black Somali, curly-headed Bedouins with delicate Semitic profiles, useless creatures whom the authorities try to keep in the desert, but who return again and

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again like wasps to fill the main road with their noisy gestures. Then there are the Parsee merchants, in alpaca coats, who lend a note of sad respectability to the scene ; they are as thin as skeletons who have escaped from the vultures on their gloomy Tower of Silence. Surrounded by their followers, the Hindus emerge from the money-changers' establishments, holding square handkerchiefs filled with Maria Theresa *thalers*. The Indian cavalymen have side-whiskers ; the Arab police gooseberry-coloured or crimson turbans ; the metropolitan army is in white shorts ; the mules are packed with multiple-barrelled guns ; and all of these creatures move about and work hard for the Empire.

I was attracted and yet driven to despair by this mountain of macaroons ; Purgatory must be something like this. How is it possible successfully to till this earth which is harder from the dryness than it could be from frost. It is being tilled, nevertheless ; I saw fresh mounds of earth, concrete shelters and covered roads temporarily impassable, for since the Abyssinian War began they have been used to store munitions. Backbay, a muddy lagoon, used as a second port, is dotted with hydroplanes with two engines and a tail, like dolphins in a fountain. When the tide is low, droves of animals cross the wet sands along the black and interminable pipe-line which carries water from a distant oasis to the new Aden. The heavy oil reservoirs, the cisterns for *Diesel* fuel, the stocks of petrol mixtures for the roads, seem to be climbing up the rocks which resemble mountains rising in tiers on Coromandel screens, on each panel of which there is a different picture. In Arabian shipyards well-careened ships are made of Burmese and Siamese teak-wood.

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The adjoining gulf makes the aviation ground seem huge, and it looked to me the largest I had ever seen. Apparently, however, it is still too small, for opposite, on the Arabian coast, there are other camps where the barrack buildings are made of old packing-cases from Vickers, Armstrong, Handley-Page, Rolls or Hawker.

Some camels were passing on a reddish background; the animals' necks were curved and muzzled with cord, their eyes covered with a net of string. These creatures are no longer impressed by the landing of a hundred aeroplanes so near them; they move as slowly as the camels who brought the Queen of Sheba to Aden, or to Hodeiah, when she sailed for Suez to be reunited with King Solomon.

From where have these caravans come? From the last unexplored country of the Near East, from Yemen which begins beyond Aden and is governed by the independent Imam of Sana. When, after the Great War, the Turkish Empire fell to pieces for the hundredth time since the eighteenth century—but this time the pieces were enormous—Irak, Hedjaz and Yemen were detached from it in 1918. Yemen, with her diagonal frontier from Bab-el-Mandeb to the Persian Gulf, extends across the desert. This country is almost entirely unexplored except for the mountainous region of Sana and the coast at Hadramaut. Already English aeroplanes are flying in this virgin sky. . . .

Returning by way of outer Aden, I cross the huge square, entirely enclosed by fortifications of yellow shale and built in the sixteenth century by the Portuguese. The wind caught in this square is violent but without real force; it is an ineffectual wind whose fury abates suddenly, like a quarrel among Orientals. I walk through the Arab town full of goats, sheep with black heads, children wearing

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bright clothes, and I notice with admiration that the street is lined with a front row of decent houses hiding behind their courtyards a second row of closed blue houses, and blue is not, here at Aden, the colour of Mary. The tropical sun shines on cisterns, on cemented cupolas, on heavy artillery, and on planes which are rising, descending and dipping continually. The roofs of the Banks and the administrative buildings are protected with sacks of sand too heavy for their frail terraces.

A black P. & O. liner with black funnels arrives out of breath. Like men smoking a *hookah*, the cargo-steamers inhale oil from the Anglo-Iranian pipe-line which carries the oil down to the port. A small squadron of destroyers, sold by England to a small Oriental kingdom, is in sight. These job-lots of warships, which England sells gladly, are classified in the Admiralty budget under the contemptuous heading of "warships sent to the shipbreaker or sold to foreigners". This squadron has hoisted large standards as it leaves the mole and pretends that it belongs to the home fleet.

Two salutes from the guns, once a week, announce that the Indian Mail is in sight. While our governors of Eritrea succeed each other in the rhythm of moving cartoons, the English governor at Aden, seated comfortably in his chair, one eye on Bombay and the other on Mombasa, visualises the two main roads of the Empire, the one to the Cape and the other to India. He is also considering the underwater cables of the *Eastern Telegraph Company* to India and Australia, and those to Zanzibar and Cape Town.

Aden has not forgotten that she was a fortified town during the Roman Conquest in the year 24 B.C. The town is on the alert, as she has been for many centuries,

A D E N

and as she is shown to be in that Dutch engraving at the Cistern Museum. Heretofore, however, no danger has threatened Aden from the north, and fortunately the powerful defences under construction since the autumn have not been needed. Is England, in order to make use of them, turning her eyes towards the Arabian *hinterland*? Aden's fortifications have been perfected during the last century and the town could easily become the base for an immense new colonial territory. The great value of this district, Yemen, is not yet generally appreciated.

Yemen's coastal region, the southern fringe of the road to India, is the only shore which has not yet been made safe, the only coast without a lighthouse. Large windows would be necessary in this blind wall, which, behind Aden, extends as far as Mascata: is England preparing to pierce this wall?

TOWARDS BOMBAY

CHURNING the sea with their screws, as Hindu preachers churn it with their wands, the steamers leave Aden loaded with oil. They sail round *Steamer Point* and disappear in the Indian Ocean. Their prows are in the centre of a V-shaped furrow enlarged in the direction of the only port on Malabar's inhospitable coast, the city founded by the Portuguese, *Buena Bahia*, good port, Bombay.

On the 20th of May, 1498, the Portuguese with Vasco da Gama jumped ashore at Calicut with the artless cry of "*Christos e espicaria!*" Christ and spices! Dazzled, they gazed at the walls of the Indian cities, covered with copper plate. For the first time these men, discovering new worlds, were not bankrupt merchants or adventurers who had lost their way. The Portuguese expeditions were official, commanded by regular admirals, charged by their King "to conquer new territories and spread Christianity". Ten years later, Albuquerque captured Goa. The Portuguese Empire, extending as far as Java, had been born. For a century Portugal monopolised Oriental trade, and the trade in pepper, indispensable to Europeans wanting to flavour their tasteless food. The profits in the pepper trade were often 1,500 per cent.

One cannot speak too highly of the Portuguese's extra-

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ordinary energy. As soon as Albuquerque had mastered Goa, where he made accessible to his little country the vast expanse of Oriental India, he left, took Malacca, established relations with Siam, returned once more, captured Ormuz on the Persian Gulf, took Bab-el-Mandeb and sailed up the Red Sea again as far as Jiddah.

His frightening travels were most adventurous. He had no maps, no compass, no chronometer, nor any of our modern scientific knowledge. Besides, he was constantly expecting to encounter monsters, unknown marvels or disasters. To conquer half the world, he and his handful of men sailed forth in caravels of two hundred tons. Their crews were superstitious men who, influenced by Venetian agents, had been convinced that they would be transformed into negroes as soon as they had sailed round the Cape of Good Hope. When these sailors saw that their skin was tanning under the sun, they wanted to revolt.

Compared with the Portuguese's ambitions, our modern imperialistic desires, considered so insatiable, and our successes, seem very trivial: the United States went to great expense to acquire the Philippines, the English fought the Boers with difficulty; the French, after thirty years, are still involved with schisms in Morocco; and it took four hundred thousand Italians with tanks, gas and aeroplanes to deal with Ethiopia.

After a century of robust health, the Portuguese Empire began to be weakened by the Dutch, great merchants eager to acquire Far Eastern markets. The *Oost Indische Company* was the first of those great chartered companies, which include the *Compagnie des Indes* and the *East India Company*. In the end, wars and the rivalries between these

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companies gave England the Indian Empire after France had failed to win it.

Thomas Stephens, in 1579, was the first Englishman to set foot on Indian soil, and his letters awakened in his compatriots the desire to come into direct contact with the great peninsula. The English merchants who went out to India were immediately imprisoned by the Portuguese authorities. But already it was too late: the defeat of the invincible *Armada* had broken the Spaniards' power, and their Portuguese allies and England were preparing to conquer the road to India.

All this began with a small company consisting of a hundred merchant adventurers who each subscribed two hundred pounds sterling. This nucleus of the *East India Company* competed with the English Company in the Levant which traded with India under considerable difficulties by way of Muscovy. The Levant Company was exporting increasing quantities of metals, thin plates for swords, ivory, mercury, knives, skins and furs, and importing calico, ginger, indigo, carpets, sugar, ammonia, opium and pepper. The Dutch were worried and suggested an alliance, but their offer was refused. At Deptford, at the mouth of the Thames, the Company established huge dockyards. Their organisation was based on that of the United Provinces, which Colbert copied and which inspired Peter the Great. Naval schools were founded; draughtsmen designed anchors and rigging; geographical and historical services were established; ships' logs were kept and offices were opened to co-ordinate the sailing and the landing of vessels.

As yet British ships did not exceed two or three hundred tons, like Vasco da Gama's. The lovely clippers with

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three masts were not in use until the nineteenth century. The designs, embroidered on linen by the old pensioners at Greenwich hospital, perpetuate the memory of these clippers. They were like huge bats with top-heavy wings ; twenty-five sails on the large mast, seventeen on the fore-sail. These clippers, the *East Indiamen*, greatly impressed the populations of the countries through which they passed on their journeys. Pictures of them can still be seen in the designs made by South Africans, and displayed by them for the benefit of their peoples.

The *East India Company*, which was reorganised twice in 1708 and 1814, existed until 1858, and was an important factor in the history of the world. In 1665 the Company occupied Bombay, which had been ceded by the Portuguese. Bombay then became the seat of the *Honourable India Company*. To this day the Bombay coat of arms proudly proclaims that it is *Urbs prima in Indis*.

It is here that we shall stop, at the gateway to the Peninsula, at the end of our journey by sea. In the forest of masts, rising in the north from Cross Island, native boats of all kinds and steamers ready to sail remind us of other countries. Here are the *khoties* and the *dangies* of Cutch and of Sind, the *pattemars* and the *battelas* of Konkan. With their upright prows, the *baghlas* resemble Pharaoh's spice boats which one can see designed on the walls of Egyptian tombs. We shall see these *baghlas* again in the Persian Gulf. Meantime the Karachi Mail steamer is awaiting our arrival from Europe to carry the mail to Koweit and Bassorah.

We are at the end of the sea route to India.

PART SIX

THE LAND ROUTE BY THE
PERSIAN GULF

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Black Sea, united this Sea with the Caspian Sea, and from there, by Lake Aral and Lake Oxus, descended towards Bactria. This was the traditional route from the north which made it possible for Byzantium, separated from Central Asia by the Parthians, to remain in contact with Turkestan, India and China.

We are, however, more particularly concerned with the southern road because, in the first place, as the spinal column of a vast road-net across Syria, Armenia, Chaldea and Persia, it served all of Anterior India, and because, in the second place, this road was and still is the road to India. The main artery began at Ephesus, descended towards the Euphrates, Babylon and Mesopotamia; then rose by way of the Caspian ports across the mountains and reached Alexandria of Arie (our modern Herat). There the road was divided into three branches, one of which rose across Sogdina as far as Aashgar in Pamir, an intercontinental silk market held at the Tower of Stone, where twelve Chinese caravans arrived every year. The second road continued in a direct line to Ortospana (Kabul in Afghanistan) and the third descended as far as the Indus. The two latter were thus direct roads to India. This important artery, connecting various parts of the vast peninsula of Anterior Asia, made it possible for the richest districts and the most important cities to trade with each other.

In the south there are but few roads to the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf. Between the barren sandy plains of Arabia and the high wall of the Taurus, the one as terrible as the other, there are accessible regions, inhabited by peaceful nomads and made habitable by springs and wells. When one left the Mediterranean, one could

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hope to see the fresh verdure of Mesopotamia in a month. The Roman conquerors therefore decided to build three new roads for the Indian trade ; one through northern Syria, from Seleucia (Alexandretta to-day) to the Euphrates with Antioch as the trading centre ; another by way of Phœnicia and Lebanon with Baghdad as a terminus and trading centre ; the last by way of Transjordan and Petra to the Persian Gulf.

The Romans, mediocre travellers and inefficient merchants, were never able to establish a proper transit trade or to deal directly with producers. They bought from the Greeks who, in turn, bought from the Arabs, who bought from the Indians and the Ethiopians. These three intermediary stages naturally increased the price of merchandise beyond all proportions to its value. Rome was ruined by agents.

Rome had gone mad about luxuries and Oriental subtleties, which she imported in incredible quantities : the Romans needed Ethiopian slaves and eunuchs, trained monkeys and paroquets for the ladies' drawing-rooms, Nubian lions, Afghan leopards, tigers from the Punjab for their circuses, pheasants, game, chickens, honey (sugar was still unknown), bananas, apricots, coco-nuts for the pro-consular tables. They imported textiles from Media, linens from Kashmir, silks and skins from China, furs from Tibet, tropical shells, Ethiopian gold, pearls and mother of pearl from the Persian Gulf, wood from Lebanon, sandalwood, aloes, cloves from Persia ; Alexandria stocked white and black pepper for the Romans, as well as ginger, cinnamon and nard, Hadramaut kept for Rome incense, gums, dyed cotton fabrics, rouge and camphor.

India exported to Rome her best weapons and her jewels,

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diamonds, chalcedony, onyx in thin slabs, quartz, rock crystals, amethysts and the opals so loved by the patricians, sapphires from Ceylon, aquamarines, turquoises, lapis lazuli, precious metals. Pliny speaks of "the islands of gold and silver" and of "Chryse, the land of gold in the Gulf of Bengal".

In exchange, Rome exported only wine, lead, pewter, glass and purple dye. This shows to what an extent her trade balance was unfavourable. To buy her imports, therefore, she was obliged to pay in legal tender, to increase her taxes, to put pressure on the Empire and finally to destroy it. The day came when she could no longer pay. The Orient, which she had once looted, the Orient of implacable smiling courtiers, had emptied the pockets of her client.

As Gobineau says, Alexandria had ruined Rome.

P E T R A

WHEN a traveller arrives at Elji near Maan, after rolling interminably across the vast plains of Transjordan, he must leave his carriage because this is the end of the road. After walking for half an hour he will see a heap of rocks, curiously shaped, a reddish froth resembling an accumulation of linen at the feet of a mattress-carder. These round stones conceal in their depths one of the most mysterious cities in the world: the ancient city of Petra.

I should like to have stayed there longer, not because tourists are unfamiliar with this uninhabited city which was abandoned for the benefit of Palmyra, not because the Arabs let it fall into oblivion until it was rediscovered when the railway line was laid from Damas to Mecca, when Colonel Lawrence's raids made it famous and the desert was conquered by motor-cars, but because all the commerce from the East and the Far East has passed through this city for centuries.

Petra, Rome's store city on the borders of Egypt on the Red Sea, the store city for her ancient port, Berenice, is as lifeless as a sea of asphalt. Petra lies helpless at the bottom of a ravine where a spring makes possible the growth of a few plants. The ruins of a Byzantine fortress made of large quarry stones can still be seen, and the

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sections of this crumbling wall, resembling sacks of cement thrown into the sea for the construction of a mole, rise and then seem to sink down again into the unstable earth. Some Bedouins, more raddled than desert patrols, emerge from the natural holes in the earth, or from cells carved out of the rock. Some of these Bedouins, a finger in their noses from which dangle silver rings, will ask you for alms and point to the passage entrance.

For one enters Petra by way of a gorge, an old river-bed covered in fine sand. The owner of the humblest dwelling would scorn such an entrance to his home. The passage is S-shaped, and filled with sharp stones, obstacles and meandering curves; no light can penetrate into it. The passage is as dark as night, for the rocky partition walls, pressed close together like cracked lips, meet at the top. One must move forward as cautiously as a wolf, and one feels like an intruder prying into some secret. Everywhere there are rocks; they brush against your shoulders and knees; if you move your arms, you touch rugged sandstone. When you look up you are frightened by the overhanging rocks, by the fierceness of their shapes, by the very small strip of blue sky which sends down only a rare ray of sun to reassure you.

The sandstone is red, not unlike that at Angkor, and beautifully veined in black, violet and blue. The blurred outlines on the rock remind one of enamel on baked ceramics, and the twisted stalactites are like those distorted cardboard figures at Coney Island or that nightmare in cement, the Guell Park in Barcelona.

The modern visitor is as surprised, on leaving the passage, to see the first Monolithic Temple as was Burckhardt, the Swiss, when in 1812 he went to Mecca in dis-

P E T R A

guise and discovered Petra which, despite the Crusades, had remained unknown since the twelfth century. This Roman temple of the late period is like an old actress whose heavy make-up looks ghastly behind the footlights. The charm of Petra is in its setting. In this city, which one sees as the canyon widens, there are no monuments. The temples, with sculptured façades, are imbedded in the rocks ; the inner sanctuaries have been hewn from the stone. Innumerable cells, too, have been carved out for the inhabitants' dwellings. The public buildings, the baths, the theatre itself, are merely different forms of the same rock, the quality of which is unique. The city was called Petra, the Rock, by the Greeks.

Petra benefited by two curved mountain ranges ; between them a cavity was hollowed out by an ancient river, now run dry, the Wadi Musa. This old river-bed is now the main road in the town and the public places are grouped round it. One of these is occupied by the tents used by the few tourists who visit Petra. From here one can see the pavement of the ancient road made by the old river, which once flowed through this cataclysmic landscape. One also sees a confusion of columns, fragments of corinthian capitals, the acanthus designs of which, looking like curled cabbage leaves, are strewn over the ground, the breakages accumulated by centuries. The order once established here by men has been destroyed by chaotic earthquakes. The temples rising from the rocks at three sides have crumbled away, leaving nothing but pieces of walls split like old wood. Among the ruins saxifrage and fig trees are now growing.

Higher up, at about the height of the fifth floor of one of our modern skyscrapers, black rectangles project

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from the rock and heads appear. After centuries of desolation, Petra is again inhabited. At dawn goats, mules and hens, together with a few Bedouins, leave their dwellings; they belong to a little hidden nomad tribe, who were tempted by these free homes and so remained. The large temples are laid out in the first recess of the rocks; every architectural style is represented here as it was during the disastrous era at the beginning of our own age. Glued to the mountains, these temples might be called the Saint-Sulpices of the desert; religion has left her imprint on prehistoric caverns.

Then the path narrows again and the wound seems to close, changing the main road once more into a gorge. Finally it is as narrow as a ribbon and in the end it is merely an impenetrable crack. The amphitheatre of mountains is closed on all sides; we must ascend to a great height to see the horizon over the jagged brink of the hollow which is glittering under the evening sun. Behind us, there are other precipices, other rocks, rising higher and higher, while, below, Petra stretches out before us indefinitely.

The canyons of Ardèche or the gorges at Cheddar, the gorges at Rio or at Tinto, the pass at Micchu Picchu or the defiles at Rummel are cheerful and smiling as compared with Petra. Only the colour of the town, this tender rose, the rose of Fragonard, the colour (less romantically) of the large shrimps of Alexandria—offers a slight relief. The stone, apparently unending, and veined in some sections like tropical wood, having queer, sponge-like holes in it, has been constricted or hollowed by the tremendous movements of the earth and rises with a frightening steepness above crevices in which one man

PETRA

could keep a whole army at bay. The rock has satisfied all the needs of the city; the inhabitants live in it, they make their tables and chairs, their beds and their coats of arms of it; and they die in it, their graves being merely hollows the size of a man.

Though it is fifty degrees celsius, the traveller shivers with cold at the bottom of the gap dotted here and there with blossoming pink laurels, where no sound is audible but the clop-clop of his mule. Kites soar silently three hundred feet overhead, in search of robins which are invisible because they are the same colour as the rock. The dry silent stream imitates with stones the movements it would make with rushing water. In the quietude one can hear a pebble rolling into the next gorge, behind a lateral fissure. Whenever a Bedouin cries out as he passes, his call resounds like a clap of thunder echoing and re-echoing from rocky wall to rocky wall, into the infinite distance.

The night has come, and in the darkness the rocks resemble griffins or camels' humps. On different layers of the rock, the fires lighted for the evening meal are like square furnaces burning at the heart of this dead city, and have the most fantastic effect because, for centuries, Petra was the secret hiding-place of Arabic riches.

The Nabateans, the inhabitants of Petra, were caravanners on the road to India, a difficult trade. Pliny tells us that goods transported from the Ganges to the Tiber had to be reloaded sixty-five times, and that consequently these caravans were frequently robbed. With their merchandise, these cameleers always stopped at Petra before resuming their journey to Rome, because, tired of being attacked on the highway, the Nabateans hid their goods in this natural cistern.

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What a contrast between this desolation and this hidden gold, between these gorges filled with ingots and the miserable lives of the nomadic camel-drivers. . . . Imperial Rome got her supplies from this stone quarry. The dealers in precious stones grew fabulously rich, for they accumulated incense and myrrh in the hollow rocks as well as gold and precious stones, silks and sandalwood, powder, aromatic essences, benzine and amber. Their flesh was softened in the baths, their minds in the theatres ; they were enchanted with that hybrid art which plagiarises every style, the Hellenic, the Assyrian, the Egyptian. These decadent people, too weak to be constructive or to make use of the natural rock, were content merely to hew it ; laziness and fear caused this degenerate race to revert to the life of cave-dwellers ; their deified princes were subjugated and vacillated between the kings of Syria and of Egypt, between the Romans and the Parthians. Gradually stripped of their treasures, the effete people of Petra, who worshipped female idols, became extinct, and solitary individuals and hermits moved into the sinister gorges once full of treasures from Golconda.

Migratory peoples moved across the plains without suspecting this hiding-place, the Crusaders vaguely called it *le Vaux Moïse* without stopping (with the exception of Renaud de Chatillon, a specialist in the looting of caravans), and for six centuries no human being entered this strong-box which even to-day has never been forced open. At Petra there is a theatre and no play, everywhere in the town there are traces of water and yet the water itself has vanished. Petra has never realised her destiny, just as several of her temples are unfinished ; one would say that, tired or desperate, the workmen left before com-

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pleting their task. The civilisation of Petra resembles a shattered nereid on a pediment who remains suspended above the void, a fragment of wreath in her hand, cut off neatly like the thread of her destiny.

From the third century onwards Palmyra, rich in natural resources, inherited the privileges and prerogatives of Petra. The kings of Palmyra were strong enough to make the wind blow across the desert and the open spaces. The kings of Petra, on the other hand, had become anæmic in their golden seclusion. Palmyra, on the road to India, was the centre of barter, an open market where money flowed freely ; Petra was the reverse ; economy, a barren accumulation of riches, a hoarding of treasures, fear and a secret weighing more heavily than the gates of the tomb.

Petra is shaped like a funeral urn full of ashes, pearls and bones.

PALMYRA

I SHALL not describe Palmyra, the great attraction of our Syrian territory, for the town is well known to most tourists. Palmyra and her necropolis, the customs of the Meharists, and the aviators billeted on the Hypogean, Queen Zenobia, a prisoner, bound with golden chains behind Aurelian's chariot, the famous Hotel of the Sands—all these seem to have been created solely for literature or the cinema.

The monuments of Palmyra are imposing but not beautiful; even the Roman art of the better period is not very attractive and still less can be said for that of the decadent age. As soon as the Romans ceased loudly to affirm their power by public works, or to defend it with fortifications, and began to dally, they played with foliated Corinthian columns, with pampres and scrolls, with modillions, medallions and rose-windows; they invented (oh, horror!) metal capitals for columns; they were led astray by pilaster ornaments and they lost their sense of proportion in an effort to achieve an objective which they did not understand in the least: the beautiful.

But although the works of art in Palmyra reflect the decay and the servitude of Rome, the architecture of the town retains some traces of its Asiatic origin. Voices still murmur above the stones, which died enslaved. The

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Syrian, Aramaic, Persian and Arabic inscriptions speak as many languages as hotel porters ; and everything in Palmyra—the funeral portraits, with their profiles of carpet merchants ; the massive jewels ; the heavy marble busts of the newly rich ; the stone plates engraved not with poems, epics or laws, but with the tariff rates established by Emperor Hadrian and with a complete list of the taxes levied on the merchants of Palmyra when silk, spices and gold arrived. . . . Everything in Palmyra has an atmosphere of commerce, bazaars, the frontier and profiteers.

In Palmyra I love only the deserted stretches of country, the sad ruins and that feeling of divine vengeance which pervades Oriental cities devastated by earthquakes. Nothing attracts me in Palmyra but the Bedouins' fires behind the drum of a column forgotten on the sand, a goat standing on a broken peristyle, the return of the seasons in this landscape which seems so dead, the croaking of the first frogs beside the Sérail Spring announcing that spring has come, the black scorpions, hurrying away like souls departing this life into cracks at the sides of the caves. To make me want to linger in Palmyra, I must see the dawn, when the sun proclaims the new day by a grazing fire which lights up the colonnades, the porticoes, and the base of the triumphal arches.

ANTIOCH

THE Euphrates and the Orontes are shaped like a bent syphon through which the products of India, the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia are poured into Seleucia, the port of Antioch. Then they are diverted into that cornucopia of plenty, the Syrian coast. Antioch, on the direct road to India, was a meeting-place of all races and cults, from the most noble to the most fiendish, a place where people could enjoy the pleasures of Europe and of Asia. Advanced ideas stimulated the inhabitants, just as the earth was disturbed by earthquakes. At the same time, Antioch was imbued with the sickening odour of Roman decadence and with the pure atmosphere of the new Christianity. In Antioch the disciples of Jesus Christ called themselves Christians for the first time ; here, too, those æsthètes who provided the later Empire with scented and long-haired writers strutted about. When literature begins to replace soldiers at the frontiers, the end is near : one day the Persians, coming down from the mountains of Armenia, surprised the entire population of Antioch at the theatre and attacked them. The city, fallen for ever from its high estate, was then useful only in so far as it supplied stones to Nicephorus Phocas, who built fortresses with columns and capitals with acanthus designs, and as it presented the Crusaders with doctrines. In

ANTIOCH

Antioch they discovered Aristotle's philosophy, which they transplanted to the mountain of Saint Geneviève in Paris.

Antioch is the key to the port of Cilicia, but to-day this key is turned in a large empty lock. The outlines of this lock can be estimated because they are natural: they are the crests of a mountain range, in front of which, like a moat, flows the Orontes, a river more rapid and more powerful from melted snow than the Aisne or the Yser. Three hundred thousand souls once lived in Antioch; where are these men; these souls? The city has sunk under the earth. The Alaoite peasants till the soil eighteen feet above pavements of beautiful mosaics only partially excavated by the Louvre, Princeton University and the British Museum.

Charming Alaoites of the country-side! They remind one of eighteenth-century Turcomen in their high boots of red leather, their green shirts, their rolled belts weighed down by tobacco and their savings, and their square tonsures. Here in Antioch something ends which has come from a great distance: these peasants' boots—the Mongols' boots of oiled paper, the Manchurians' felt boots, the Tibetans' of parchment, the yellow boots of Chinese Turkestan, those of the Balkans now disappearing at the German frontiers; for where boots cease to exist, the roads, that is to say, Western civilisation, begins.

When I see the Alaoites' sombre red boots, hanging like lambs with cut throats in the old *souks* of Antioch (the only ones, with those of Aleppo, which are still picturesque), I can imagine the roads these boots have travelled, sheathing the legs of nomad riders, crossed over horses' withers or resting in cord stirrups—how far these boots

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must have come to reach this Mediterranean side-turning leading to the *Road of Silk*.

To-day I climbed up the mountain beribboned with footpaths as far as Daphne. The earthly body of this mythical nymph is now sold in faggots of laurel and carried by a thousand little black mules who disappear under their green burden. At Daphne twelve waterfalls, the purest water in the world, rush down between the mossy mountain ranges and end under the young fig trees. I came from the south ; for two months I had seen fresh spring water only in mirages. When I closed my eyes I could conjure up a thousand burning deserts ; I sank down on my knees and let the water run between my fingers until they were numb ; I lay down on my stomach and drank until my chin and my nose were chilled. And shrilly in the morning air the frogs greeted the water as the birds sing to welcome the new day.

THE LAND ROUTE TO INDIA IN MODERN TIMES

THE Mohammedan ascendancy which prevented Christians from using the sea route to India also made the land routes frequented by the ancients more or less inaccessible to them. After the thirteenth century, furthermore, the Hansa cities, as well as the *English Levant Company* of the sixteenth, preferred sending goods by way of Moscow, Novgorod, Astrakhan and the Caspian Sea to Turkestan, India and China. Deshayes, Richelieu's ambassador, who brought to France Persian silk from Peking, travelled by this route, thus avoiding the ruthless pirates in the Mediterranean.

When the Ottoman Empire weakened, however, the roads in Asia Minor would have been opened up, had an unexpected obstacle not intervened. The great chartered companies, which monopolised trade with Oriental India by way of the Cape of Good Hope, defended their privileges. In vain, Eldred brought back from his voyage to Bassorah in 1583 alum, copal, nux vomica, opium, cochineal, pistachio and rhubarb; in vain, during the reign of Louis XIII, French navigators, at the instigation of the Capucin monks established in Persia, obtained from the Shah territories on the Persian Gulf in which "to carry on trade" as Monsieur Gabriel Hanotaux tells us,

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“ in diamonds from Bagolate, rubies from Ceylon, emeralds from Persia, pearls from Ormuz, nutmeg from Bantam and cloves from the Moluccas ”.

Sémandy's and Volney's determination was useless ; Magallon's commercial treaty with Egypt was of no avail ; and Waghorn's efforts to cross the isthmus at Suez were futile. For two hundred years, by means of intrigues, corruption, or by sheer inertia, these English and French companies successfully thwarted plans of consuls and shipowners to prevent negotiations with the Port or to render illusionary the apparent results finally achieved by their opponents.

Despite these companies, however, the names of Aleppo, Baghdad and Basra soon became known in Government offices. The idea of crossing the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf, an idea which had been asleep for three centuries, revived so effectively that England wanted this profitable commercial route for herself.

Since the eighteenth century the English had maintained business offices in Shatt-el-Arab, and there they made life very difficult for their European competitors. In the middle of the nineteenth century, in fact, they tried to penetrate Mesopotamia : two ships bound for India and bearing the promising names of the *Euphrates* and the *Tigris* sailed up the Euphrates. The English asserted that a Turkish decree gave them the right to use this waterway, but the Tsar protested, and this was the first stage in the Anglo-Russian rivalry which culminated in the Crimean War and later conflicts between the two great powers concerning their influence in Persia. One is still shown the spot on the banks of Shatt where the *Tigris* was caught so suddenly in a tornado that there was not

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time to take down her sails. The ship was lost with all lives on board in the centre of the river. This meant that England's first effort had failed ; her second attempt, almost a century later, was equally unsuccessful : this was Kut-el-Amara.

The Persian road has never been very hospitable to the English, but for centuries, nevertheless, they seemed unwilling to give it up. They vacillated between the sea and the land route. They had General Chesney explore the desert track from Basra to Damas at the time when Mehemet Ali, a nationalist and Francophile, made them unsure of their domination of Egypt. Then again, when the situation was brighter for them in Cairo, they occupied Aden. But never for a moment has England allowed any other great power to follow in her footsteps. England's long struggle to dominate the means of communication in the Mediterranean, Baghdad, Basra and the Persian Gulf has been carried out in the following stages :

1839—Great Britain would not allow Persia, this country at the shores of the Gulf, to have a fleet.

1850—The French claimed the right to refuel their ships at Mascata. As the British Government could not openly oppose this plan, they made pin-pricking wars on France for almost half a century, accusing her of smuggling arms or of encouraging the slave-trade. In the end, England succeeded in getting rid of France.

1885—Russia, after her success in Afghanistan, showed some inclination to fly her colours in the waters of the Gulf ; then she suddenly gave up this desire, as though paralysed, and wisely withdrew.

1887—The Germans tried, under the guise of Persian

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colours, to enter the sacrosanct waters. They were evicted at once.

1903—The Hamburg-America Line sent some steamers to Mascata to prepare a junction-point for the Baghdad railway. England responded to this advance of Germany's pawn on the chessboard by moving her king or rather her viceroy. Lord Curzon left his palace in Bombay and made a rather menacing journey of inspection along the Persian Coast.

1915—A military expedition in the Persian Gulf, commanded by London, and carried out by the Indian Government without sufficient organisation, was largely responsible for the disaster of Kut and the slowness of the advance on Baghdad.

After the War, and despite the breakdown of Imperial Russia, England apparently made no particular effort to establish herself on the Persian shores of the Gulf. But when she noticed that, since 1934, Italy had been spending freely and lending money, and that the Italians were popular among the Arab chiefs with pompous titles and vaguely defined frontiers, she remembered the value of this heritage and could not forget that it had cost her four centuries of conflict to capture the keys of the Persian Gulf. The expedition to Mesopotamia cost England forty thousand men and thirty millions sterling; and this expedition was not arranged merely for the pleasure of liberating the Arabs or the people of Irak. The time was past when England could choose between the sea and the land route. To-day she needs both, because the air route passes over the continental roads. The invention of steam gave England Suez; internal combustion engines, Bassorah and Baghdad.

ALKUWAIT ON THE PERSIAN GULF

ALKUWAIT is a hundred kilometres from Basra and from the Bahrein islands; five hundred kilometres farther south there is Sharja in the Gulf of Oman, where English aeroplanes, the only ones allowed in this locality, take off for Gwadar and the inhospitable coast of Baluchistan. Then, farther south, comes Mascata, so that there are enough pickets along the Persian Gulf. Yesterday the Gulf was worthless, but to-day it is jealously guarded because from this coast a lateral penetration of Yemen and Hedjaz is possible.

Following Ibn Saud, the King of Hedjaz, who has two hundred motor-cars and about a thousand camels, the English are advancing into the largest of the Arabian deserts, into that central region of Dahna (called the country of a Quarter, because it covers about a quarter of the total surface of Arabia). In this desert, protected by a belt of moving sands, there are tribes so savage that they have never heard about weaving or iron. Almost a century ago Wrede, the explorer who had come from Hadramaut, tried to penetrate into this mysterious region. To avoid the moving sands, recognisable by their extreme whiteness, Wrede moved forward step by step, testing the ground with his stick. He suspended a stone weigh-

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ing fifty pounds from a cord and threw it into the desert. Like an anchor sinks in the sea, this stone was absorbed by the sand. Wrede's Arab guides, however, refused to go with him to the sandy depths which they called the sea of Safi, after a legendary king who was said to have been engulfed there with his army. Even on our modern maps the desert of Dahna occupies a space as white as its sands. It is the least-known region of the world.

The small fortresses on the Gulf of Oman and the Pirate Coast, fortifications once under the nominal control of the Ottoman Empire and since the Anglo-Turkish agreement of 1913 under Great Britain's domination, are the gateways through which England enters the *hinterland*. The English are reconditioning the ancient tracks leading towards Mascata or Petra. By flying over the desert, their explorers can discover the hidden cisterns from which the Israelites drank and—a recent event—they are also finding the hog-backed tap-holes said to slope in opposite directions, which betray the presence of mineral oil in Persia. Oil exists along the Gulf, at Alkuwait and near the rest of the Arabian coast.

Vast Arabia, of which Syria is merely a small northern section, has surrendered all her keys: Jiddah, Aden, Basra and Alkuwait to the British Empire. Will our Allies, who in agreement with us seem to be inaugurating a new Syrian policy, realise Lawrence's dream and create an independent Arabian empire? Central Arabia, called Hedjaz, occupies in any case a position on the map of the world which England cannot easily ignore. For on all four sides, three by sea and one by land, this country faces the road to India.

To-day Hedjaz is Ibn Saud.

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sein was defeated, and abdicated in favour of his son, Ali, who was forced to evacuate Mecca. His forces were surrounded behind Jiddah and he disappeared as his father had done.

On the 8th of January, 1926, Ibn Saud became the King of Hedjaz and the master of a large part of the road to India. Will he be cleverer than Hussein? For the moment, he is accepting the invitations and the motor-cars offered him by the British Government, and this winter when I reached the Persian Gulf, he was visiting Alkuwait. . . .

Ibn Saud is not a lazy Oriental travelling slowly in caravans. He is an active and forceful man whose traditional Mohammedan passions are stimulated by his fervent nationalism. Supported on the one hand by London, on the other by Mecca, he is the absolute ruler of his Empire. He travels with extreme facility from one end of it to the other, from the Red Sea to the Euphrates. He has one window on the Persian Gulf—Alkuwait—where his friend, the old Sheikh, often gave him hospitality when he was in exile. Looking out of this window, Ibn Saud can see a thousand pearl-fishers' boats, the last vestige of that fleet which gave the Turks the domination of the Gulf, and he can say to himself that Arabia was not always a blind country suffocated by the sands. . . .

Mohammed's successor is a modern sovereign. We have mentioned that he organised the holy pilgrimages to Mecca in motor-cars and aeroplanes. He is not afraid of European commodities, on the contrary, but his concessions to progress conceal a Mohammedan soul handed down to him from the ages, from the early days of Islam when Moslems were proud and intolerant. Ibn Saud has

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centred his reforms in the town where he was born—Nedj. Here this Calvin of the desert has established the most rigid Mohammedan puritanism. Punishments overwhelm the inhabitants, who are forbidden to smoke, to consume alcohol, to wear silk, to pray on the tombs, to respect marabouts or believe in their miracles, or to have faith in magic or amulets. They are not allowed, furthermore, to observe any of the old pagan rites, the cults of idols or of stars. Luxury is abhorred, and precious metals are forbidden because Ibn Saud hates them. Thus his sandy desert has been transformed into a desert of virtue, and he is faithful to Wahab, the founder of the reformers' sect which, since the eighteenth century, has consistently preached the pure life and the simple faith. Ibn Saud has all the virtues and all the faults of that Arabian race which has produced such accomplished human beings. Hard towards himself, this merciless fighter is the best product of that high Nedj plateau which produces the best warriors, the best thoroughbreds and the quickest racing camels. At eighteen, Ibn Saud had three wives, at thirty-seven he had more than a hundred and to-day, at fifty-five, he has one hundred and sixty wives who have borne him twenty-seven sons. He does not take the trouble to count his daughters !

There are thirty-eight million Arabs, a small people compared with the two hundred and ten million Mohammedans in the world, but these Arabs believe that they have the divine right to govern Islam. They graciously allow other Mohammedans to pray to Allah and to come to Mecca as pilgrims, so that they can kiss the black stone at Kaabah. As the head of this proud race, Ibn Saud is very powerful. He is not unaware that this road to India

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which is coming closer and closer to the straight line, along the thirtieth parallel, the Hebrews' Biblical route, will soon have to cross the Nedj, which is the heart of Arabia, in order to reach Cairo. Will England be tactful enough with Ibn Saud? If she openly sides with the Zionist colonists and allows their persecutors to be defeated, her ally of to-day may possibly become her enemy to-morrow.

ABADAN, THE PETROL PORT

WE are in the Anglo-Persian Oil Company's domain. Persia has considered it wise to change her name to Iran, thus adding to the traveller's confusion about names and frontiers in Asia Minor. The Anglo-Persian, now the Anglo-Iranian, is one of the few oil companies (including of course the companies in the U.S.S.R.) controlled almost entirely by the state. The Anglo-Iranian, founded in 1909, possesses incalculable petrol riches, and its subsidiary company, the *British Tanker*, controls a high-seas fleet of three hundred and fifty-nine tank boats and tank steamers. The Anglo-Iranian owns eight hundred kilometres of pipe-line, one million and three hundred thousand square kilometres of Persian territory (quite apart from its land in Irak, the Argentine and elsewhere). The Anglo-Iranian has also established a refinery on the Island of Abadan, in the Persian Gulf.

It is difficult to understand the working of this world road, this omnipotent circuit which, like a turbine, goes from Egypt to India towards the Persian Gulf and then returns to the Mediterranean via Baghdad. And it is impossible to imagine the powerful forces influencing this road unless one considers petrol, the source of its very existence, more closely. Petrol is the restorative of aviation, the ambrosia of fleets, and the spirits of the army.

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Without aeroplanes, motor-cars and steamers, the road to India would be a miserable caravan track. Tons of heavy oil and refined mineral oil are devoured by the carburettors of these machines.

At Masjid-i-Suleiman, in the mountainous regions of Arabistan, the pipe-line begins; through it the sacred sap flows a distance of two hundred and thirty kilometres to the port of Abadan. Here the oil is emptied into the red reservoirs of the petrol fleet. Provident nature, looking wisely into the future, thus places a supply of this beneficial liquid on the road to India. The Anglo-Iranian domains and the Shell Company's in Venezuela are the most extensive petrol reserves in the world. It would take these two companies numberless years to exhaust their supply, while the Standard Oil Company, so it is said, has only enough for fifteen years and the Soviet for a mere eight.

Mineral oil, the best liquid explosive, is stored safely in the huge workshops at Abadan. These workshops are alight day and night, painting the sky a colour more delicate than the roses of Ispahan. The burning towers of modern alchemy rise towards the Arabian horizon. They are like the fabulous towers of Yezides, where devil worshippers practised their satanic rites. The towers at Abadan are called cracking towers. There are none like them anywhere, except the Royal Dutch's at Curaçao and the Pan-America's at Aruba. In an almost unbelievable temperature of a thousand degrees the oil is distilled and fractionised into its various essential oils and by-products. There are ten communicating reservoirs, each of which can be made self-containing in an emergency. These reservoir ranges contain a hundred thousand tons of oil.

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They are refilled by pumping-stations as they are emptied into the tankers which take seven million tons every year.

Before the War, Burmese and Javanese petrol and coal from England and Heraclea were sufficient to supply the military and commercial stations on the road to India. To-day, all this is changed. The tonnage of oil steamers has increased so markedly that the river- and sea-ports exporting mineral oil have been reorganised. The Anglo-Iranian has dredged Basra and reduced the river bar. What is the building of a road, a railway, or a port to these petrol trusts paying directors millions in salaries, and with reserves of many more millions? It is customary for the company's agents to take off their hats respectfully when they pass oil-well number seven, for this well, without stopping, has produced ten thousand tons a day for twenty-five years.

When the sandy wind sweeps over Basra the smell of oil, stronger than the odour of dried fish beaten flat with a mallet, even stronger than the smell of goats, permeates the town. But the wind of Abadan is more deadly than the desert wind; in Abadan it not only stirs up a stench, it also carries with it a liquid more subtle in its effects and far more dangerous in its reaction on the nations of the world than the essence of distilled Persian poppies injected into the veins of reclining men. . . .

BASRA, THE CITY OF DATES

A HUNDRED kilometres from the Persian Gulf, where the Euphrates and the Tigris flow together, and not far from Kurna where the members of an ancient faith believe the earthly paradise to be, Basra is asleep under her famous date trees. In common with this fruit, the town is steeped in sticky idleness. The canals winding through it reflect the clay huts with cracks so hard that they cannot absorb water, the yellow straw roofs and the palm gardens. Bridges made of tree trunks connect the fields, some of them lined with gutters, others sodden and full of large puddles.

Women, veiled in black and carrying large bronze ewers, stand out in sharp relief against the white alley walls, while at the back of the cafés men suck at their *hookahs*. Basra is a city built over the water, like Venice, and curiously enough the boats here resemble gondolas. These Basra gondolas, called *bellums*, are not, however, used in the shadowy silence by romantic tourists. On the contrary, most of them are lying on the tilled land of gardens.

These gardens at the banks of the canals give Arabian Basra a Persian atmosphere. Twice a day the beneficent tide rises to the level of the Shott-el-Arab and the river overflows under the trees and in the bushes. Gardeners

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need not use their water-cans, and the mules are excused from turning the wheels as they used to do. Both men and animals rest peacefully while the tide is high. Roses, tulips, carnations, hyacinths, poppies, geraniums, all these European flowers which came from Persia have returned to their original home after a long journey. They are now shipped to Persia by horticulturalists in London and Southampton and are used for the herbaceous borders of the bungalows in the port, and the parks of the rich date merchants.

The Shott-el-Arab curves round an enormous palm grove which encircles Basra, the old city ; Ashar, the new city ; and Margil, the port : three cities in one.

Enclosed in the nets of the palm trees the brown stoneless dates, pressed into cubes, have less flavour but are sweeter than our own Tunis dates. Bales of dates lie on the quay ready for shipment. India consumes great quantities. The *samboos*, the *dhow*s, the *booms*, all these native ships with high sterns, huge masts, eccentric shapes, boats which seem to belong either to history or to the *Arabian Nights*, to Admiral Hussein or to Sindbad the Sailor, come to Basra during the harvest season and are loaded with dates.

Suez opens sandy arms to the sea, but the arms of Basra and her outposts are green. One rarely sees a forest extending into salty water, but one does so here. Thousands of date trees, a mixed and stocky throng in uniforms, their females heavy with fruit, the males carrying their leather sheaths filled with pollen, advance in close ranks into the ocean, and their palms, so close together, so green and so fresh, are like a sea within the sea.

This palm grove formerly provided a considerable

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revenue to the powerful local tyrant, the Sheikh of Mohammerah, a friend of England. His wealth was based on the dates, the pearl fisheries and Great Britain's generosity. The English suffered a loss when this master of the Shott-el-Arab, this feudal lord of the road to India, went on an expedition to the interior of Persia and never returned.

The War broke out when the first sleepers of the German railway were being piled up on these slopes near Baghdad's railway terminus. After the autumn of 1914, Indian divisions appeared. A great many vedette-boats then ploughed through the Shott and cargo steamers, anchored in the centre of the stream, were emptied by barges and the cargo used by the entire Mesopotamian expedition. Basra had never known such prosperity since the days of the Turks.

To-day this artificial activity has ceased, but the port is established and, every week, steamers of the B.I. (British India) bound for Karachi arrive. Every month, furthermore, boats belonging to the Ellerman and the Hansa Lines stop at Basra. Besides, and this does not please the English, there are Japanese steamers of the Nippon Yusen, the Osaka Shosen, and the Younashta Kishen loaded with cheap goods; while their sailors, so the English say, "stick their noses into everything".

B A G H D A D

BEFORE the Great War, European travellers did not venture into Arabia, which was nominally under Turkish domination. But immediately after the Armistice Englishmen and Frenchmen, who came to Palestine and Syria, heard that caravans had never ceased to cross this stony desert. They learned, also, that from the Trans-jordanian mountains to Mesopotamia the hard unbroken plateau would make good roads for motor-cars. With some difficulty, our military missions persuaded native guides to show them the great sand roads. Then the first tourists arrived. Towards 1920 Nairn, an Englishman, established a regular motor-car service from Damas to Baghdad; to-day, other services connect Jerusalem and Beyrouth with the Tigris. The cars keep to the road for a day and a night and are never lost in the rocks among dead camels and rare Bedouin tents. The dusty travellers, rubbing their aching backs, sigh with relief when they cross the boat bridge at the entrance to Baghdad, for they have not seen water since they left the Jordan or the Barada. When these travellers reach New Street they are disappointed by the shabbiness of the Baghdad hotels after the *Orient Palace* at Damas, and their tired faces reflect the length and discomfort of their journey. But it is enough that this service exists, for it unites the two

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roads and this connection is permanent, and these services will be multiplied. This regular service between Europe and Asia by land functions well, though it does not realise the dreams of the Germans who hoped to create the Baghdad railway.

This famous *Baghdadbahn* was one of the safety valves with which, in their *Drang nach Osten*, the Germans tried their utmost to drive through the wall of iron and of money erected by the Western powers who had been the first to reach Anatolia. Turkey had been worried when Russia wanted to approach by way of Persia, and when England hoped to cross the Persian Gulf. In 1902, therefore, Turkey eagerly accepted the suggestion that a strategic railway should be built from the Bosphorus to the Euphrates. This railway would, so Turkey hoped, give her an opportunity to observe what England and Russia were doing.

The Germans, who had begun their task with zest, stopped for lack of breath; financially, the undertaking was beyond them, and they decided to internationalise their venture. They offered England shares, but she refused. Ten years later she accepted because, in the meantime, oil had been discovered in Mosul, and the Turkish Petroleum Company had been organised with a capital of eighty thousand pounds. The *Bahn* had become an excellent investment.

By the Treaty of Versailles the Germans were forced, without profit to anyone, to abandon their railway. An-
gora was no longer interested, and England had no desire to buy a railway across hostile Turkey. Besides, motor-cars and aeroplanes were already beginning to replace railways. Nothing remained of the German enterprise

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but the line from Taurus in the north and, in the south, the section modestly called " the railway of Irak ". Baghdad had no longer any chance of becoming the important railway junction she should have been because of her key position near the ports of Persia, Armenia, Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt and the Persian Gulf.

On the roads which have replaced the railway one can see American cars belonging to Arabs, born nomads who really detest speed. Huddled together on the running-boards, stretched out on the wings, or seated on the spare wheels, the Arabs drive to town whirling up more dust than the southern wind. There are European rapid transit companies (with a deficit) which convey passengers from Beyrouth to Baghdad in twenty-one hours, driving day and night. Then there are competitive native companies which shatter the springs of their cars and the spirits of the passengers. The roads converge towards the Tigris and the Euphrates, where ships' boats pass. These round *couffas*, like the golden barques excavated in Ur, are made of reed caulked with asphalt and move forward with a revolving motion in the rapid and luminous stream. Then there are towed scows; lighters loaded with cheap wood; *muhailas* from the Persian Sea with patched sails, their masts pulled down for this river journey; steamers which pass the site of Eden and the battlefield of Kut-el-Amara, where General Townshend's troops experienced such terrible hours, and reach Basra in four days.

A little train following a straight course, the last remnants of a strategic line built by the British during their advance in Mesopotamia, conveys passengers coming from Chaldea or from Basra to Baghdad. Then the railway

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goes north. The natives in these Indian railway carriages have brought their bedding, their carpets and goatskins, and their food, consisting of ropes of dried dates. These little Irak trains, which are comfortable though they are so picturesque, go to Kirkuk, the oil district, then to small Mosul, all that remains of one of the greatest cities which ever existed : Nineveh, exterminated by the Medes. From there, travellers go by motor to Nisibin, where sleeping-cars are attached to the Taurus-Constantinople Express. This is the Turkish section of the *Baghdadbahn*.

France's relations with the Syrian frontier, and England's controversies with the Kemalists in Irak, have not encouraged tourists to frequent this new route to India, but to-day the situation is improving, the circuit is almost completed, and in a few years we shall be able to board a *Simplon* sleeping-car in Paris and reach Basra within eight days.

I stopped between trains at Baghdad, which, so visitors agree, is not beautiful. One knows that nothing is left of the huge Mesopotamian cities, once proud of their Babylonian architecture. Here the stone, the lovely imperishable stone, ends at the Valley of the Roses at the one end, and at the Hindu grottoes at the other. Supported by these two solid piles of rock, the road to India is like a bridge across a sea of sand. Here, ancient civilisations, which used soft materials for their buildings, were struck down, one on top of the other. At Ur, nine superimposed cities, nine roofs, the habitations of many generations, are now pressed down to a vertical section of only ninety centimetres. These cities have melted away entirely. The mud of the deluge itself is like a small layer of butter

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on the pre-Biblical slice of bread which represented fifteen centuries.

The Semites worked in the ephemeral, and their edifices, born of the dust, have returned to the dust. Nevertheless, this is where arches of incredible daring were first made : and from here, by way of Armenia, arches captured Byzantium and the West. These arches of dried mud mixed with silk waste were constructed without heating the material. Wood was scarce, and the workmen laboured in empty spaces, as it were, seated on the bricks which they had plastered, creating arches as swallows build a nest. The only surviving arch is the marvellous ellipse of Ctesiphon, which is equal to the hangar at Orly.

Baghdad is a city without character urbanised by an army of Turks, but its site on the Tigris, feathered with palm trees and supported by the sub-foundations of Nebuchadnezzar's palace, is very beautiful. The Kadhimain Mosque, with its exquisite bronze domes and minarets, rises from the suburbs beneath. It is like a forgotten Kremlin among wretched cow-dung cottages and it is surrounded by ungrateful soil bringing forth nothing but Persian carnations made of pottery. The houses are crooked ; the covered balconies hang over the narrow streets ; washing has been hung up to dry on the terraces. But strips of sunlight cut through the blackness of the *souks*, and we know that the outskirts of Baghdad have not changed since Haroun-al-Raschid walked through their streets disguised as a merchant. We expect, at any moment, to meet some madman in chains, a slave bought in the market-place or a Saracen " perfect in all vices ", as travellers used to say long ago.

In any case, the variety in head-gear is still worth

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admiring ; the black felt caps of national police, introduced by King Feisal to show his respect for Clemenceau ; the Arabian veils differing in colour according to the village or the clan and held together at the forehead by black horsehair cord ; the white Indian turbans ; the Syrian tarboosh which is higher than the Egyptians' ; the long scarves twisted round the heads of Moslems. These true believers, lost in the desert, had been on their way to the holy cities, but a shortage of money or will-power prevented them from reaching their destination, and so they remained here on the banks of the river, with their future shrouds wound round their heads.

From 762, the year of Baghdad's birth, until her death in 1258 at the hands of Hulago Khan, the city was the centre, the hearth and the sun of Islam. The combined force of the Mongols, the Turks and the plague, the discovery of the Atlantic route and the revival of the passage through Suez was needed to crush this city of the *Arabian Nights* and to make of it merely an ordinary market town in the desert. But King Feisal, a man with vision and subtle imagination, chose Baghdad as his residence, for a very good reason. In a future Arabian Empire, Baghdad might be the Oriental replica of Damas.

K E R K U K

MESOPOTAMIA, the mother of humanity, provides every product of the soil and sub-soil, from millet seed to petrol.

The Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 gave France the domination of the Ottoman *Vilayet* of Mosul. This was a marvellous chance to gain supreme control of Mesopotamian mineral oils ; and to this end Turkey had formerly permitted the formation of an Anglo-German-Turkish consortium. Gulbenkian, an Armenian, represented Turkey in these negotiations.

The French government, however, occupied with anxieties connected with the War and temporarily distracted, did not realise at first that the English had gained control of Mosul. We had to be satisfied, therefore, when the Agreement of San Remo assigned to the *Compagnie Française des Pétroles*, Germany's portion which had been sequestered during the War, that is to say a fourth share in the Turkish Petroleum Company, now the Irak Petroleum ; two quarter-shares reverted to England (Anglo-Persian) and the fourth quarter to America. It was arranged that dividends were to be paid in kind, a very important clause as far as France was concerned, for it enabled her to replenish her petrol supplies.

The reorganised Irak Petroleum Company began to

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transact business. It controlled 500 kilometres of roads, 300 kilometres of canals and 295 kilometres of telephone wires. Suddenly the Company was overwhelmed: Well Number 1, at Baba Gurgur, produced enormous quantities, twelve thousand tons of oil a day, filling ninety thousand barrels. This vast quantity inundated the country. Forty-two wells, all of them productive, were dug on this anticlinal at Baba Gurgur, called the anticlinal of Kirkuk. The supply greatly exceeded the demand in this zone which represents hardly three-hundredths of the concession (270 square kilometres out of a total of 90,000) and it was decided to work only fifteen of the wells. These fifteen supplied the four million tons absorbed annually by the pipe-lines. The millions invested by the *Compagnie Française des Petroles* in this enterprise are certainly safe.

The Mesopotamian oil (wrongly called Mosul Oil, because Mosul is more than two hundred kilometres from the petrol zone) leaves Kerkuk at the Kurdistan frontier and crosses the desert in a large tube which is divided into two parts at Haditha, running north for six hundred kilometres through a favourable territory towards Tripoli, while in the south, towards Haifa, the pipe-line is laid through seven hundred and fifty kilometres of extremely bad territory. The latter is the English oil; the other, issuing forth at Tripoli, is the French petrol which is refined at Gonfreville, near Harfleur, and at Martigues.

The train for the north leaves Baghdad in the evening. Next morning the journey ends below a snowy chain of mountains. Their zinc-coloured ridges are sharply outlined against a horizon of turquoise blue; for this is where Persia begins. The roofs of the houses in the villages to

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the right, that is to say in the east, are cone-shaped flattened domes. As one travels farther north the roofs look increasingly like sugar-loaves. The Kurds live here, large Aryans with straight noses and slit eyes, a strong highland people who drive their flocks of black sheep to pasture. To the left, that is to say in the west, nomadic tents made of camel fur are visible. These tents, protected against the sand by branches held together by ropes, are inhabited by Semites with hooked noses and rheumy eyes reddened by the ophthalmia of the desert. These nomads roam about constantly, like flocks of sheep. The line of demarcation is very distinct between these two races, these two styles of architecture, between these people whose homes are made of clay and those who live in tents. But on holiday in Kerkuk these two species of humanity, strictly supervised by Irak police in grey uniforms and black *kalpaks*, sit down at the same table and drown in Turkish coffee their memories of former raids. For Irak, a British Mandate after the War, was recently granted her independence.

Representatives of all faiths meet in the market-place : I saw Chaldean churches and Nestorian patriarchs, synagogues and mosques, and even devil worshippers, the Yadzides of Baiidhri, who live near here.

Under the Turkish ramparts, overhanging the pebbly river-bed, women, hands on mouths, walk shyly past the turbaned men seated on the divans in the cafés, and children in pink and green clothes cling to the hoods of the carriages. These people live as they have always lived, among dust and flies. The country in the distance is hilly ; in the fields of young grain and ploughed land, rocky mounds occasionally pierce the earth. Here and there the ground

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is humped as though it were moving in waves towards the horizon. The pure sky, a deep blue in the frosty coldness of the night, is brilliantly white in the noon heat.

Occasionally black clouds of smoke glide slowly along, so heavy that they can hardly move. The atmosphere is polluted by a strange sulphurous odour, an odour of decomposition and child-birth, of decay and industrial creation: the smell of petrol.

This smell is everywhere for a hundred kilometres round; it is obviously in a hurry to rise from the uneven ground. The word petrol means "oil from the rock" and in common with all oils it flows towards the most porous objects it can find and creeps into them; it flows across water and drips through sediments until it reaches the hardest rocks. This spouting liquid, springing from putrefied plants and forests, would have remained under the earth for ever if combustion engines had not been discovered, and if the Turks had remained in control of this country. Versailles . . . Clemenceau . . . the mineral oils of Mosul . . . the German share . . . These oil-fields are one of the few assets among the many spoils of the Great War, for most of the other loot now lies useless at the bottom of the sea or in the abyss of the economic depression. Above this subterranean wealth of oil the biblical life goes on, simple and frugal, with sheep, sunsets, old shepherds and their dogs. The inexpensive earth belongs to these simple creatures, but the subsoil belongs to modern civilisation.

I expected to find a forest of towering derricks, like those in Roumania, on the plains of Hollywood in California, or the ten thousand wells dug among the Caucasian trees

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looming up from Baku which remind one of the clock towers of an unknown cult. But I saw only five, which are sufficient to supply France and Germany. The oil rises thickly from the drilled earth and is then forced upwards by the subterranean gases which are carefully collected ; they are not lost again, flung wastefully to the winds as they were in ancient mines ; now these gases are used as a natural lift, propelling the petrol into reservoirs. From here it flows down the slope to the machines and the pumps, like so many beating hearts, send it on to the final stage of its journey to the Mediterranean. This procedure is a triumph of organised economy.

At my feet, in the grey baked mud, two bright flames, like the torch at the grave of the Unknown Soldier, rise from the ground. This is the eternal fire with which the Bible threatens idol worshippers, the divine flame adored by the disciples of Zoroaster on the Caspian Sea : this oil covered the walls of Babylon, was used to bake the bricks for the tower of Babel, caulked Noah's ark, defended Byzantium as a " Greek Fire " and was needed for Chinese illuminations. (The Chinese, who loved peace, also invented gunpowder to light their artificial fireworks.) The Barbarians, to honour Alexander the Great, suddenly lit the air, while the astonished conqueror saw the puddle of mysterious liquid in the distance catch fire by itself, " more rapidly than a man can think ". Marco Polo noticed that this liquid was not eatable but that it cured the camels' scabies.

The American engineers with the Irak Petroleum let down their boring machines from the top of the spreading derricks. These machines are not old-fashioned models used by the small American companies, but excellent

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German drills made of steel or tungsten steel ; they are pointed, curved, sharp and grinding. The engineers remain near these wells for two or three months. Day and night they work the rotating machines which pierce the ground and clean the oil at the same time. In despair, the engineers fish out the broken bits of steel and again use their gigantic dental instruments, boring into the depths of the earth for two or three kilometres. Then they remove the hot drains. Occasionally they stop, smell the rock, suck it and say with justified assurance : " The oil is ten, or twenty, or fifty yards below the surface. . . ." Then they resume their work, moistening the earth, staining the boards, spotting their clothing, saturating the air itself, until the spongy stomach of the subsoil has given up its valuable excrement.

There is probably another oil bed under the first and then another, which man will reach as soon as he has made the necessary instruments. The Trust has fixed the annual production at four million tons from Irak, and seven million from Persia. That is all. Here, only a few wells are being worked ; the others farther away are covered with a huge slab of steel and held down with screws. The oil for which we pay two francs a litre in France, costs a pound sterling per ton in Kerkuk.

I felt the earth trembling under my feet in the hangar into which they took me ; a gentle continuous vibration spreads along the entire length of this large black intestine : the pipe-line. I could hear the gurgling of the oil, a sound more pleasing to shareholders than the sound of good wine to gourmands. The oil is not removed from the subterranean vertical prison until it is caught on a level with the ground in another prison ; this one is horizontal, and a

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thousand kilometres long. God Petrol is buried with all the honours due to him; the oil is pushed forward as quickly as a man can walk and, without stopping, hustled across the desolation of the sands towards the Mediterranean ports. The pipe-line has been in use for a year and a half, and during that time it has shown magnificent results, the capital invested in it having been redeemed. Every hundred kilometres there are isolated little forts, guarded by machine-guns. Only aeroplanes and eagles fly over these small places, and give new vigour and swiftness to the heavy liquid which has not yet been refined.

This vast organisation has a very small staff. The extraordinary foremen of this industry without workmen are on the alert, making sure that the pressure is regular, and ready to send out relief lorries when the pipe-line is damaged anywhere in the desert. It is so hot that the Arabian workmen repairing the pipes wear asbestos gloves to unscrew them with. Thus from the depths of Asia the blood of war is sent to Europe, the Dionysian juice of modern drunkenness, the oil of Kerkuk, the beverage loved by Asshur, the father of Assyria and the god of wars.

“More rapid than thought”, the cult of oil has spread over the earth: from the Carpathians to the Rocky Mountains; from the Punjab to the Urals; from Sumatra to Haiti; from Venezuela to Burma; from Yukon to Morocco; drilling machines are piercing the impervious layers of the earth, exploring the ground and emptying the “pockets”. The reservoirs are filled and the oil is ready to be annihilated by the electric sparks of the motors consuming it. To find oil, to “strike” oil, as the Americans have called it since 1860, is the modern cry of all

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continents. The provident earth is treated like a cow and brings forth thousands of tons a day of rich oil and black and greenish paraffin. This production represents a net profit of thirty per cent.

PART SEVEN
THE AIR ROUTE

FROM THE EUPHRATES TO THE NILE

IN the evenings it is delightful to rest in the shelters provided by the English Air Line to India. These shelters are open to passengers using other planes as well. They are gracious little houses ; meals ordered by wireless are served, and beds are always ready for the passengers who have come down from the sky. Some of these shelters resemble cottages on the Thames, others are like forts, and others again like the *bordjs* of Southern Algeria. Letters sent *poste restante* await the passengers, and there are easy chairs covered with material from Liberty's, gramophones and magazines, cocktail bars and radio. The shelters are made attractive by animals and flowers ; shrubberies, geraniums, begonias are planted beyond the windows, and gazelles, mongooses and tame greyhounds move about among the black servants who wear white robes and red belts. The exhausted travellers are usually silent while they eat their smoked herrings, their porridge and their eggs and bacon. While he eats, the novice among them does not lose sight of the enormous machine, which has become his friend : the huge Imperial Airways aeroplane with four engines ; each propeller has four sharp blades, and these sixteen blades, now motionless, are very impressive. The traveller remembers the sinking of the *City of Khartoum* in the waters of Alexandria, and he feels uneasy.

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"If one of the engines stalls, you can fly quite a distance with the other three, can't you?"

"Oh, no, sir. One must land at once. The only planes which go on when one engine is out of order are the two-engine planes which cross India, those belonging to the Australian Line and the Dutch planes."

The Dutch plane is the king of this route. Its minimum speed is 300 miles an hour and its stride is enormous. On the Baghdad-Cairo route Dutch planes are twice as rapid as Imperial Airways, which do not take off when there is a wind.

The pilot lights his pipe. The wireless operator is reading *Punch*, and laughs.

"And you take off," the novice persists, "even when there is a sandstorm?"

"No, sir, why should we? During a storm there is sand even at a height of ten thousand feet."

"Well, does this mean you come down when a storm begins?"

"Neither one nor the other; what about visibility?"

We could hear that the postal telegraph operator in the next room was furious about something.

"What's the matter with him? Why is he in such a bad temper?"

"He is angry because he has to live in this hole; he is an ex-pilot who got so fat because he had no exercise that he was dismissed from the flying staff. And it enrages him to be 'a pedestrian'."

Outside the grasshoppers are chirping and a lost dog is barking. In the distance, we see a few trembling gleams

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of light : some Moslems are playing with their children in a graveyard by the light of a candle.

On a blackboard I read the following figures :

Baghdad	605	miles
Calcutta	3,802	„
Singapore	5,809	„
Brisbane	10,170	„

And then :

London	2,584	„
Cape Town	5,890	„

The Empire and her thousand landmarks. . . .

One sleeps well in these aerodrome shelters on the way to India, far from the towns, the noise and the dust. One goes to sleep among familiar noises : the naked feet of the servants moving about on the wooden balcony, the thump of the post-bag, the gurgling of the oil, the impact of the emptying and the filling of the tins, the motion of the pumps, the alarm clock. . . . The planes leave in the darkness at about four o'clock, long before daybreak, while the dew is still dripping from the silver wings which have been out in the open all night. The enormous iron scaffolding with its many engines is lighted up by torches ; the searchlight above the hangar sweeps the desert ; a red beacon indicates the end of the flying-ground.

The mechanic moves the horizontal rudder, and his pocket lamp cuts out large gold circles on the map ; the wireless operator is concentrating on his aerial ; the wing bracings throw dark shadowy outlines on the surface of the wings. The passengers, numb with cold, and only

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half awake, stare at the smoky petrol torch on the ground. In the small airports where there are no searchlights, the front lights of a motor-car are used to show the outline of the flying-field. The moon covers the silver plane with another layer of silver.

“ ‘Morning, sir.”

The second English pilot calls the first “ sir ” as though he were the King of England.

In our country a cabin-boy slaps the pilot-in-chief on the shoulder and calls him “ old pal ”.

At Basra, or rather at the airport of Margil near the port, a bungalow shelter, already Indian in style, will soon be opened. At present, one still lands at Shaibah. Here the French and Dutch planes coming from India by way of the Oriental Persian coast arrive ; but as England is having some difficulty with Iran, English planes fly across the Persian Gulf and land on the west coast which is Arabian. Two squadrons of hydroplanes guard the Shott until a permanent air-port has been built. Under the floats of these hydroplanes, the muddy waters of the Tigris and the clear waters of the Euphrates mingle without being absorbed into each other.

The English Colonel in command of Basra looks with pleasure at the hibiscus, the poppies and the sweet-peas which he has planted in front of his house, situated at the point where the two rivers meet. He will plant more of these flowers for the new airport.

“ People who have flown all day over the peaks of Baluchistan will be glad, in the evening, to see my larkspur,” he says.

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If he were a German, an Italian or a Frenchman he would discuss the elections at length or the most recent technical achievements, or he would launch forth on his favourite subject : propaganda. But this man is English : he discusses flowers.

On another occasion, I left Baghdad at dawn. Even the dogs—the most hysterical ones in the Orient—could not keep the exhausted travellers awake. The magic carpet, ready to fly towards the stars and to soar above the terraces on which the inhabitants of the town are asleep, seems to graze the gilded cupolas gently with its sharp border as it rises.

I can still hear the first noises of the day : the prayers to Allah, repeated from minaret to minaret, and brutally cut short by the puffing of the compressed-air pumps and the chugging of the starting engines ; these voices are not raucous and Arabian like those rampant as far as Tangier and Granada ; here the gentle cooing of Hindu voices can already be heard.

The aviation ground sinks into darkness. In the light from the reflectors one can see the quays and their Assyrian sub-foundations ; two pontoon bridges across the rapid, muddy river appear to have been made at a moment's notice for the use of troops and make the town seem war-like.

Seen from above Baghdad reminded me of an Anatolian carpet ; the mosque was the central motif in a border of dark green. A moon of classic beauty accompanied us for a long time, and left us only when, her task completed, she entrusted us to the rising sun ; then, no longer needed, and used up until only a thin web was left, she disappeared

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to her rest, as a night-watchman goes off duty when his work is done.

Then the day breaks ; a desert morning like so many others. The sky changes from green to grey, then turns a sulphur colour, then the shade of blood-red orange juice. The pilot ignores the shackled camels trying to avoid the wings ; in three days' time in Kenya he will pay as little attention to the charging buffaloes or the hippopotami. . . . How many worlds we pass in a moment ! In a few hours we move across the entire lives of men—great men—of the past. Alexander the Great passed the Euphrates, travelled along the Caspian Sea, crushed the Turcomen, entered the Punjab, invaded India, reached Hyderabad, founded seventy cities, and died near here, at Babylon, when he was thirty-three : Alexander lived as we fly. . . .

We see the nomads' brown tents, lying low against the ground, their backs towards the wind ; the sky, a pale violet, is soft ; the wind begins to dance in the rays of the sun ; this playful wind crushes everything and builds the dunes from the debris. . . . The Bedouins have abandoned their camps, leaving behind stone fences, like wandering circuses. . . .

It is April ! For a few days everything will be green, but as the desert is rocky the vegetation is superficial. From Iran to Morocco, and as far as Andalusia, red rocks skim the surface of the sand. All transportation, the Dumas motor-cars and the *Air France* planes, which leave us here, converges at Rutba Wells, the Irak frontier station. This is the first well of the Mosul pipe-line to the Mediterranean. Some of the oil under the earth's surface is emptied into cement vats closed with large padlocks. Only the pilots have a key. Rutba, a sad little port, resembling

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a stranded vessel, has masts, two aerials and Bedouin mechanics in overalls and Arabian puggarees. Handsome Irak soldiers are stationed here ; there are curved silver daggers in their belts. Some nomads bring us their riches : curdled milk. The engines are silent.

On the sand some stones against the jinns are like the designs of indecipherable scrawls in a wizard's book ; the birds advance in a war-like formation, frightened by the emptiness. Then I hear the desert speak, for these desert winds can speak ; they utter whole sentences. One turns round, but no one is there ; nothing is visible but a whirling cloud of dust, waltzing like a young girl with a slim waist, and this hollow column of dust rises and stretches out until it is completely transparent. I thought it must be a living creature, but I could see through it. The figure dies ; it has danced itself to death.

The road to India passes through this empty space and though it is invisible its outlines are as clearly defined by borders of the mind as the *Champs Élysées* are marked out by pavements. One cannot fly over this road to India for five minutes without seeing something : cameleers, mechanised artillery or lorries. It is like the Suez Canal, where actually one sees few boats, though half the world tonnage passes through it. . . .

The desert continues until the sand turns to rocks and layers of flint. The desert is like a table thousands of kilometres long. We reach the edge of the table and suddenly we float about in space like a piece of paper until we reach the carpet : the first green carpet since we left the Euphrates—and this one is in the Holy Land. To look down and suddenly see the Promised Land, which the Crusaders called the *Jordan Beyond*, is one of the most

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surprising sights I have ever experienced. No guide-book announces this view (but then, since aeroplanes captured the world, all guide-books must be rewritten). I see Mount Nebo, steep terraces of Nubian sandstone, broken up by vertical squares with a little loose earth in the hollows. Here the last Bedouin tents are sheltered. More and more oil-wells can be seen gazing at us from their black eyes on which pistachio and mastic trees have placed a few eyelashes.

At the end of the desert, as though in the margin of this huge blank folio, the railway is visible, the old Turkish strategic line of Hedjaz running directly from Damas to Mecca, a symbol of that Arabian unity concealed behind the mandated territories of the coast, Syria and Palestine, which are European possessions in the centre of Islam. I see the works of art which it amused Lawrence to scorn. Several of the stations are still roofless and riddled with bullets. The houses in the distance belong to Amman, Emir Abdullah's capital. The city, connected with Jericho by the Allenby bridge, is the centre of Transjordan.

Here, too, the English have adopted the Roman Empire's frontier policy. During the Turkish occupation Amman was destroyed. It was once a great Roman city, with theatres, baths, huge fortifications, but now all that survives are a few stations made of old stones from the ruins of small forts built during the Crusades. England made Amman secure once more, and the city revived; the *souks* have been reopened. Amman is a very articulate capital, filled with crowing cocks, and proud of its wells; it is the terminus for the armoured cars which crush the dreary flint plains described on maps as "broken country". Amman, the home of black cattle with white hair, is the city of Jupiter Ammon, the goat god, and not only the

FROM THE EUPHRATES TO THE NILE

milk and the meat, but everything in the town, including the hotel beds and the bank clerks' clothing, smells most unpleasantly of goat.

The English Hedjaz railway is protected by large bulwarks built along the route during the last fifteen years and called Hedjaz, Yemen, Transjordan and Palestine. The English have not, however, built other railways, for they have ceased to believe in the practicability of strategic roads which are now so exposed. But they have strengthened the existing road with aerodromes at Maan, Amman and Lydd, between Jerusalem and Haifa. In Lydd, now under construction and smelling of castor-oil and orange blossoms, there is a motley gathering of Arabian mechanics, German-Jewish planters, Egyptian pilots and Palestinian police wearing the Astrakhan tarboosh.

Before us the Dead Sea, which has a curiously congealed appearance, glitters in the sun, and the salts and potash in the water enhance this brilliance. At the right, almost directly under us, is the Jordan valley, and Jericho is beyond among sycamore trees and rocks with monastic caves. The plane, flying over the Judean mountains at a height of three thousand feet, follows its relentless course without deviation.

Misty showers, clinging to the top of the mountains, whip against us, soaking us, and the chilly rain pours into the grooves of the corrugated iron. Two climates struggle against each other on this division line : that of the desert against that of the Mediterranean. For a few seconds one cannot see twenty yards ahead. Then Jerusalem emerges and we can make out the cypress trees, the Jewish and Armenian districts nearer the Tyroposon and Mount Moriah, the octagonal Mosque of Omar and the gateway

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of the Maugrebins. But the Holy Sepulchre Church and the Christian quarter in the north are not yet visible.

Houses with red tiled roofs are sprinkled over the landscape. We have crossed the desert ; and suddenly we are confronted with a place resembling Pontoise, with the outskirts of a great Western city and factory chimneys rising towards the grey clouds. The Jewish quarter is built on the side of the mountain and continues on the other side towards the land of the Philistines. Already the ruins of ancient Hebrew walls conceal from us the Cedron valley, the Mount of Olives and Gethsemane. We have passed Jerusalem and the religious enclosures, the domed Greek monasteries. Below us are the electric works of Tel Aviv, the tennis courts and the hospitals, the colleges and the nurseries. One glance suffices to make one understand the enormous progress Zionism has made in Tel Aviv.

We fly over the mountains dominating the watch-towers of some Frankish castle ; the air currents have subsided and we land smoothly on the undulating plateau of the Philistines. These green fields are not particularly exotic ; they are like the flat country round Boulogne-sur-Mer or Caux.

At the horizon, the Mediterranean stretches out her ribbon of deep blue. We see Ascalon among cornflowers, Gaza among red poppies. In our British plane we skirt the western shores, whereas the Dutch machines take the southern route by way of Cairo and fly over those soft migratory dunes which could not stop the progress of Abraham, the Pharaohs, Alexander, Bonaparte, or Allenby.

I have never understood why hydroplane pilots are so fond of the land, or aeroplane pilots of the sea, but these predilections are a fact. We fly in a large circle round the square basin, which is the Oriental Mediterranean where

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Palestine ends and Egypt begins. Here El Arish, the only large city of the coast, is situated. This town is the hinge of the desert and of the green plains ; here all the armies of the world have met and fought, and one day, perhaps, the enemy will be Alexandria, the stronghold protecting the second channel of the Suez Canal, mentioned occasionally by the English when they want to worry Egypt.

The smoke of Port Said rises in the distance ; in an hour the aerial route will cross the maritime route at Dekheila, the air-port of Alexandria (because the landing-ground at Port Said is merely an exposed stretch of beach without hangars).

Will the air or the sea route to India finally triumph ? Passengers, undoubtedly, will prefer to travel by air. Our sons will see innumerable aircraft ploughing through the blue sky of Egypt, where the Mediterranean's thunderclouds and storms alike are absorbed by the thirsty desert just as wine is consumed by a drunkard. Our sons will see planes under the grey tropical skies and under the black skies of the Equator.

But will goods always be shipped by the cheapest route, by way of Aden ? Heavy commodities undoubtedly will be, but already those rare and perishable articles, which only Europe can supply and which are so popular in the Orient, are sent by the new air route. All goods which are the fashion (and in the colonies fashion enjoys an enormous prestige) go by air ; Egypt is clothed by air and Australia prefers to receive in ten days' time what it takes steamers forty to bring to her. Airport statistics are striking : spare parts for expensive machinery are usually shipped by air and so are car parts, cameras, electrical

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equipment, microscopes, drugs and surgical goods, wireless batteries, films, beauty preparations, expensive clothes, eggs for incubation, grain, living animals, all these things are already being sent by air. What will the Red Sea steamers carry when industrialised India begins to produce her own dynamos and turbines, iron rails and steel goods, textiles and motor-cars? The tonnage by weight and the tonnage by commodities are not the only factors to be considered in estimating the returns of a route; there is another item as well: the turnover of a business venture.

THE ETHIOPIANS ON THE ROOF

THE Negus did not choose Jerusalem as his first residence after his defeat because he wished to compare his Calvary with that suffered by the Son of God, nor because he wanted to add his lamentations to those of others at the Temple. Nor did he wish to associate his exile with that of the German refugees. The Negus chose Jerusalem because Palestine is the Abyssinians' second home.

Ethiopians were among the earliest pilgrims to the Holy Land; Saint Jerome mentions this fact in 386. Their Christianity had some strange features. Their baptisms had a triple tradition: they were circumcised according to Jewish custom; the Cross branded on their foreheads with a red iron, a mark going from the roots of their hair to the nose, was a negro ceremony; and their immersion an orthodox ritual. The Ethiopians had hostels, monasteries and embassies on the hill of Zion; the Emperors in Constantinople heaped gifts upon them, in order to propitiate these black Christians, who controlled the entrance to the Red Sea and thus the key to the box of spices. The Ethiopians, who brought ivory, incense, gold, emeralds and Indian products to Jerusalem, also supplied Imperial Byzantium. This trade continued until the seventh century when the Musselmen conquered Egypt and the Abyssinians' influence declined in Jerusalem.

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Seven hundred years later everything was changed : the Sultans of Egypt again granted the Ethiopians a free passage through their domain and they paid no tribute when they approached the Holy Sepulchre. At that time, a curious rumour was spread throughout the ancient world, from China to Portugal. According to this rumour, a mysterious sovereign, called John the Preacher, ruled over Nubia and Ethiopia. Occult and frightening powers were attributed to him. The Sultans of Egypt knew the secret of his influence : the King of Ethiopia dominated the sources of the Nile, and from the heights of his inexhaustible reservoir, he could, if he chose, turn Egypt into a desert.

In Jerusalem, near Mount Calvary, the Abyssinians owned chapels of Abraham and of Melchizedek ; they also had a Chevet Altar at the Holy Sepulchre and other sacred places which the Greeks later took from them. The Ethiopians retained, among other prerogatives, the privilege of lighting the Holy Fire on Holy Saturday ; a special messenger was sent by the Emperor of Ethiopia to perform this task.

“ This priest [Father Roger wrote in 1632] is dressed in a long robe of white linen. In his hand he holds a glass lamp filled with oil, but the wick is not lighted. When he reaches the Holy Sepulchre the Turks open the door for him and he goes on by himself. When he has entered, he remains alone, and the Greek Patriarch and the other prelates stay outside with the people, holding their candles in their hands. Then the Ethiopian priest lights his lamp with a tinder-box which he has secretly brought with him for this purpose. . . . ”

I remember a Holy Week I spent in Jerusalem four years ago.

THE ETHIOPIANS ON THE ROOF

I had spent an entire day at the Holy Sepulchre trying to fathom this maze of various confessions and nationalities. Centuries of history were reflected in the Byzantine apses on Arabian columns, the Frankish crenelles in Acanthus design on the Constantinian capitals, the geometrical Saladin patterns on Gothic arches, the Crusaders' tombs in Byzantine mosaic and the marble floors made smooth by the wear of the Faith. I contemplated this Christian league of nations, but a million lamps could not pierce the obscurity of the radiating chapels, for the ancient vaults are black from the smoke of incense, wax tapers and conflagrations which illuminated them for the Persians and the Caliphs.

"This roof," I said, "sheltered all of Christianity. This Holy Edifice was the home of every ritual, even the most exotic, including the sacred rites of the Copts, the Armenians, the Nestorians, the Georgians and the Maronites. This place was their common sanctuary."

My guide interrupted: ". . . with the exception of the Ethiopians. Ill-treated by other believers, even by their close relatives, the Copts, who had taken possession of a chapel near the Sepulchre itself, these poor blacks retired for some time to the Column of Flagellation, where Chateaubriand saw them. But they were driven away from there too, and they then took shelter in an unexpected place which I shall show you to-morrow."

The next day, Holy Saturday, at nine o'clock in the evening, we climbed up the steps of a worn staircase in the oldest part of the Holy Sepulchre Church. We went up to the roof. To my great surprise we emerged in the centre of a negro village. On the roof of Saint Sepulchre, where the rafters of cedar from Lebanon are warped, and round the heavy cement cover of the cupola—an enormous

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belly with a round navel-like little window throwing a faint light on the crypt of Saint Helen's Chapel—there were wretched straw and clay huts, some miserable small trees, a zone swarming with black children and women preparing *couscous*. This is the encampment of the Ethiopian monastery with its thirty or more monks stuffed with prayers, fed with poverty, overwhelmed with bodily misery, and burning with intemperance and religious devotion.

The entire Ethiopian community of Jerusalem, the Coptic pilgrims from Egypt, as well as the orthodox Arabs from Palestine, were crowded round the central tent. It was early in April and the moon was a slender sickle in the chilly sky. Jerusalem has an altitude of two thousand four hundred feet ; the night was very cold and the Faithful shivered in their threadbare clothing. The tent was lighted with oil-lamps, and furnished with carpets and velvet seats : the Superior of the monastery was seated in the centre ; his cape and his tiara, everything about him, was black. The monks round him wore Abyssinian togas and close-fitting national trousers, which had once been white.

Next to the Superior stood the English Governor of Jerusalem in a khaki uniform, the French Consul-General, some English civil servants and some foreign guests. Behind them stood the monks who were crippled, or at least I thought they were, until I heard that they used crutches merely to rest on during the long ceremonies.

“As they have no chairs [Greffin Affagart wrote in 1533], they each have a support for their stomach so that they will not be tired from standing for so long, and when it is time to chant the Psalm of David they take up their crutches in both hands and dance until they are exhausted and lie down

THE ETHIOPIANS ON THE ROOF

wherever they are ; they call this dancing, and say that they are following in David's footsteps. . . ."

These monks, standing upright, hold in their hands Egyptian musical instruments with three chords which must be of the best period, for there are similar ones on the tomb paintings in Thebes. At the same time, other monks, squatting at the feet of the Superior, clasp between their knees egg-shaped drums, identical with those which the Americans forbid in Haiti, because they rouse in the primitive mission pupils all the fury of the African subconscious mind.

The monks chant softly and move about with a rolling gait ; gradually the singing becomes louder, the men move faster, the rhythm of the stringed instruments and the drums is accelerated. Then the prayer changes into an intense and hysterical recitative, and the genuflexions into the contortions seen at negro revival meetings in New Orleans.

My guide whispered to me :

"The spectacle was not as good as usual. Too many guests had been invited in the hopes that they will treat the community generously. Without them, you might have witnessed one of the real holy dances. . . ."

After innumerable chants had been sung the Superior and his acolytes, who were more sombre than the Sarrasins, clothed themselves again in gaudy sacerdotal robes, on which tinsel had been used instead of gold embroidery and jewels. The priests walked under a ritualistic parasol, shaped like a mushroom ; and one who had been unable to get one of these used a European umbrella covered with absurd ornaments and ridiculous trinkets. The bishop, wearing a high bulbous tiara, very effective in the candle-

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light though it was made of poor material and the ornaments on it were cheap, took shelter under a white parasol, like a religious Buddhist. Then he rose, and followed by the monks, the foreign visitors and the Superior, he walked round the roof three times, as though to enclose in a magic circle the convex skull-caps of the priests which in turn covered the profound concavity of the Calvary valley.

Several years have passed since I spent that Ethiopian night on the roof of the Church of Saint Sepulchre, but I have never forgotten the strange procession, nor the sharp wind of that Palestinian April. I have never forgotten the Oriental night, surrounded by a group of natives smelling of goats and incense, pushing forward, jostling each other to touch the garment of the officiating priest. I shall always remember these followers of a primitive cult in which the Liturgy of early Christianity is mingled with Oriental ecstasy and with the dark mysteries of negro idolatry ; I can still see before me those poor relations of the great Christian family, who were once the porters on the gateway to India, men in search of employment, but rebuffed by everyone, and without a single person to defend them.

Unless, perhaps John, the Preacher, will finally revenge them by emptying Lake Tana. . . .

ABRAHAM'S MECHANISED AGRICULTURE

A FEW days ago I stood at the door of a Jewish school in Jerusalem. I saw the pupils whose faces resemble those of their ancestors, dressed as scouts, standing in columns of two and then marching down the road. They were led by adjutants in close formation, who shouted rhythmically: One, two, three, *four*. . . . Their eyes gazing proudly ahead, their heads raised, and walking very straight, they took possession of the pavement, and showed an astonishing seriousness and determination for children from seven to ten years of age. Little Arabs, standing about in casual groups, looked at the young Jews; the Arab boys were in rags, spotted with flies, and filled with breathless admiration.

I contemplated the tremendous difference between these two desert tribes, separated by centuries, by millenniums, which to-day are confronting each other. One of these tribes travelled through the world and extorted from Aryanism the secret of her power. The other, fatalistic, passive, disorganised, had seen nothing, and had no desire to learn. Which of the two was wiser and happier? Which of them could consider itself the victor after so many extraordinary adventures? Here, at the heart of the Orient, at the door of this school, I was faced with the problem of East and West.

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Zionism is confronted with the same dual problem. Four years ago, when I was in Palestine, the country was extremely democratic; there were many Communist colonies, and Marxism was purer than in the U.S.S.R. itself, for women were nationalised, children remained anonymous and were called by numbers, like chickens; and when members of this democracy awoke in the morning they put on the first shirt they found, without wondering who had worn it the day before. . . .

In the streets, one met only Slavs with square heads and shorn skulls, Poles and Roumanians, agricultural labourers in shorts, their legs naked, and French soldiers, tanned from service under the sun. There was an atmosphere of lower Broadway, ice-cream and five-cent stores; no good shops, no luxury, no military zones, no sandals existed. If any woman had worn a hat it would have been removed by force, and food cooked in butter instead of in the ritualistic sesame oil would have caused a revolution.

To-day, the German refugees have brought Western civilisation to the banks of the Jordan; they are proper and serious and their clothes are well pressed; they have that moneyed respectability of the German middle classes. For the last two years, these Jews have been developing the nucleus of a new class: the Zionist bourgeoisie. Professors, surgeons, lawyers, doctors and merchants have improved Jerusalem. The love of the country they have lost has made these people unconscious propagandists, who express their *Deutschtum* by planting flowers in their gardens, by arranging charming homes, by giving their studious children large spectacles. These new arrivals are as staunch Zionists as the others from whom they are separated by ten centuries of civilisation.

ABRAHAM'S MECHANISED AGRICULTURE

At first Palestine, like most states in their primitive beginnings, was a collectivist state, but one with a faith. Then hierarchies were born and became stronger. United against foreign countries and against their common enemy, the Arabs, the Jews themselves were, however, divided amongst themselves. They are divided first of all by that old spirit of the Talmud, that pitilessly purifying spirit of dissension. They are divided above all by those Old Testament antitheses which are a thousand years old : the Kings against the Prophets ; the Kings, political, sensuous, fastidious ; the Prophets, fanatical and puritanical. Everywhere in Palestine and particularly in Jerusalem, in the clubs and the schools, these two tendencies confront each other. The older inhabitants disapprove of the splendid new shops like those in *Unter den Linden*, of the concert halls, like those in the *Kurfürstendamm*, of the art exhibits, the display of fashions and silk stockings. The emigrants' daughters dance in the *King David* on Saturday evenings, or even go out with Christians. And, what is more horrible still, these newcomers have introduced in their homes the custom of employing servants.

Will national unity ever be achieved in this new country, still so decentralised, to which the world is now sending representatives of all colours of skin, customs and languages, individuals as different from each other as Spain is from China, or Tibet from Canada ? It is probable that this unity will be achieved. Our age, when aeroplanes and the wireless are bursting so many bonds, is also creating new boundaries and conceptions, and some of them are more solid and better adjusted than the old.

Jerusalem and Haifa are the capital and the port of this

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new Zion, the Zion of the German refugees, but Tel Aviv and Jaffa are still the centre of the old Messianism ; here for the first time in two thousand years, among the fragrant orange trees, the Jews are again tilling the soil. At Tel Aviv, buildings are made of cement ; the beautiful heavy stone of Mount Zion is no longer used. The modern houses are simple, and built in rows ; the walls without foundations are surrounded by eucalyptus trees without roots, and the people in these homes have no traditions.

The orange trees have grown since I was here last, and their odour, heavier and more heady than liqueur, fills the air as far as the feet of the mountains which conceal Jerusalem. Enclosed in cacti stretching out protective spines, these Hesperides trees display straight rows of their fruits standardised according to Californian methods, and soon to be packed in boxes of a hundred, a hundred and twenty, or a hundred and forty-four ready for shipment to London and Marseilles.

What a bustle this new life is. Not a tarboosh, not a turban in sight—the Arab has retired, but this does not mean that he will not return. Official immigration has been restricted, secret immigration is carefully watched and the Jews inundate Palestine, establish and arm themselves, and organise local militia when they live in isolated districts, for they are determined not to be bled as they were in 1933 : if the Arabs attack, they say, we shall strike back blow for blow. The Arabs began to return in April 1936 ; they did attack, and though there have not been a great many victims, a number of dead were left on the field of battle.

Jaffa (not to be confused with the port of Haifa farther north which we call Caiffa in French) is not a good port ;

ABRAHAM'S MECHANISED AGRICULTURE

what does this matter ? the steamers fling their cargoes on to the beach, and watering hoses, houses that can be taken to pieces, barbed wire, tarred paper, all these goods are picked up by strong arms, and absorbed by the *hinterland*. In Egypt I observed the interesting tendency shown by Islam to accept European tutelage, and this is due to the emancipation of the *fellahs* by the industrialisation of agriculture. Modern agriculture encourages them to organise into agricultural associations, and so on. But these efforts are insignificant as compared with agricultural Zionism. The entire Orient is amazed by the foreign capital, by the rural associations, the ultra-modern methods of publicity, the splendid irrigation which makes it possible for one Jewish family to live on one hectare of land when formerly they needed eight or ten. The German refugees have brought with them the secrets of the German dye industries ; to-day the Red Sea companies for the exploitation of salines, the electrical companies, the sugar refineries and the breweries are among the best organisations of their kind in the world. To-day, the second best firm manufacturing artificial teeth is in Palestine.

Everything arrives in parts in this newly mechanised Palestine : turbines, electrical generating stations, motor-cars, refrigerators, drilling and milling machines, fire-tube boilers. The new Jewish nation is synthetic and it, too, is reconstructed on the spot by separate parts coming from Fez, Chicago or Lwow. Fortunes, too, reach the banks bit by bit and are then welded together into the large reserve capital so indispensable to mechanised agriculture : gifts, loans, exchanges, dowries, fluctuating or stable currencies, wandering capital which, learning from the experience of others, has escaped from home before

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it is too late and seeks refuge in this territory. . . . Statesmen, eager to know what to-morrow will bring forth in the world, would do well to listen at Jaffa or Tel Aviv. The Jewish seismograph registers the slightest tremor, the depression of the barometer which precedes a typhoon. At this moment, and this is a premonitory symptom of the approaching crisis in Central Europe, Austrian and even Polish capital is flowing into the Banks of Palestine.

YOUNG PALESTINE

THE German refugees have made of young Palestine a country of kindergartens, dispensaries, schools and libraries. The babies thrive, attended by nurses in white, and the little children, dressed as scouts, hurry from the playing field to school, to their camps and their blackboards. After gardening for eight hours, the young men attend a class in French philosophy, learn Arabic while they dine, and go to the agricultural college in the evening. It is the same tremendous thirst for knowledge which has stirred the U.S.S.R. from the beginning. But here in Palestine this frenzy to learn and to serve, to give oneself entirely, is even greater; the youth of Palestine is bursting with frantic energy.

England watches, protects, helps. After the War, she transformed Palestine into one of the great turntables of the Empire. To-day, England realises that this turntable is not made of ore but of gold. Palestine no longer has a price; milliards flow into the country; and since the arrival of the Germans, the few olive groves are worth more than land at La Croisette or on the Promenade des Anglais. Stones have been torn from the ground, rocks are blasted, and the water, found at incredible depths, is at last welling up in these deserts.

If the Jews did not feel that their enemies, the Arabs,

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were lying in wait for them, the neighbouring territories, Transjordan and Syria, would be cleared, cultivated and exploited in a few years. Then anti-Semitism would disappear in Poland, Roumania, in all of Central Europe, because no cause for it would remain and we should witness the birth of a new world. But will the Arabs permit this? As compared with their fanatic devotion to racial purity (and the Jews' as well) the followers of Hitler are ineffectual novices of the racial cult.

Fortunately these neo-Hebrews in the Promised Land are invincible in the social and economic struggle, and, taking the offensive, the Jews have shown surprising persistence in overcoming the difficulties connected with manual labour. This the Arabs did not expect. Haifa is the port of Tel Aviv, a large Zionist colony, and if dockers' strikes were organised here, the Arabs in Haifa could ruin Tel Aviv. There is a permanent danger that this may happen. The Jews averted this danger by advancing money to the trade unions in the port and thus gradually establishing their own cells in them. The Arabs extricated themselves from this spider's web by founding new trade unions to which Jews are not admitted. But through the Histadruth, the Palestinian central trade unions, the Jews have created discord, they have instructed the workers and spread discontent among them, they have increased the hourly wages to seven francs, thus ruining Arabian employers. To-day all the dock-workers support the Jews, who are the masters of the port of Haifa.

This Jewish state, however, which is still in its infancy, is beginning to know the social conflicts and class differentiations experienced by older countries. In Palestine, this disharmony is a symptom of the increasing birth rate.

YOUNG PALESTINE

There are as many new arrivals in the day nurseries as there are new immigrants in the ports. These immigrants pass the barbed wire of the frontier stations, enter the country with tourist visas and then remain, moving stealthily about ; formal marriages are arranged for them by special agencies organised for this purpose, and they are divorced immediately afterwards. Everything in the Promised Land tempts them to return. If England had not put obstacles in their way, if neighbouring Egypt had not refused to admit them to her ports, the population of Palestine would have been a million this year. One day it will be. Then Palestine, to-day a mandated territory, will demand complete sovereignty ; she already has a national flag and a national anthem ; this amazing creation, an imported country as it were, will become autochthonal again and will need only a President of the Republic or a King to make it complete.

Whatever happens it will be to England's honour to have planted an old root-stock, asleep at the bottom of a sarcophagus, and to see it bring forth flowers.

FROM ACRE TO HAIFA

THE little fortified town of Acre, a wild Arabian island surrounded by the incoming tide of immigrants, hides itself behind enormous battlements, with mediæval pointed arches. At the foot of the Tower of Flies, by the ancient mole, schooners are asleep and looking like a Vernet picture. Some peaceful Bedouins, seated on the high benches of the café, quietly sip their drinks, but the Jews will be wise not to trust this drowsiness. . . .

The open port of Haifa is so large that one cannot see the end of it. The White Cape at the horizon, a rift in the sky as white as a limekiln, a powerful cliff breaking off the last foreland, is the northern frontier of Palestine and at the same time the border of Phœnicia and the Holy Land. Refugees from the *Reich* are conveyed here by French and English and new Jugo-Slav steamers with one blue smoke-stack. Every two weeks a crowd of emigrants is disembarked; many, kept away from Jerusalem by the high prices in the city, settle here. In a few months or even days, a quarter of the town is changed beyond recognition. It is no longer Carmel, it is *Moabit* or *Schwabing*.

A workmen's city with standardised square houses has sprung up. Motor-cars sputter along the roads, buses follow a zigzag course round the allotments squared off with barbed wire and resembling concentration camps.

FROM ACRE TO HAIFA

Fat cattle, imported from Holland and crossed with the thin hunchbacked animals of Damar, leave black marks in the clover and the gorse. One can see the new business centre of the city, five hundred yards below.

There was a Germany in Haifa before the War, called the "Colony" by the Knights Templars who established themselves here in the last century, and gave William II, disguised as a Crusader, an unforgettable reception. The *Reich* of the Kaiser and that of the Führer have some things in common, such as their skill in training their nationals to capture foreign markets. In an underhanded manner, the Hitler regime offers to restore to the Jews, who left Germany so hastily, their sequestered fortunes, not in currency, but in the form of merchandise exported by Germany to the Orient. The *Deutsche Bank* and the *Anglo-Palestine Bank* preside over these transactions, which are managed by a Dutch Jew. By this ingenious method Germany has warded off the boycott against her products and has made commercial travellers of her victims.

I saw some of these "made in Germany" products being unloaded in the port of Haifa, with American motor-cars and electrical equipment; I saw furniture, too, in huge cases with the inscriptions: *Frankfurt, Essen, Munich, Dresden* . . . I saw the refugees' furniture suspended in the air at the end of a crane, and then deposited on this hospitable quay, so far from their home.

To-morrow these goods—now being manipulated by workmen, dock-workers without turbans, that is to say Zionists—will be conveyed by lorry along the roads lined with olive trees of Asiatic Cap Martin, which is the extreme point of the Samarian mountains. The owner, his shirt-sleeves rolled back, a man with a shaved head, will empty

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these cases with the help of his family. Then this pioneer from Halle or Leipzig will cover his books and his works of art with a canvas sheet, and spend the nights in an empty packing-case, under the stars, until he builds his new home.

How can anyone help being moved by this new Exodus ! Some of the greatest nations of the world have been created by unfortunate refugees. Who made the United States if not a few exiles fleeing from persecution ? A nation will be born one day of all this suffering ; already she is being born and the port of Haifa is the witness of this astonishing fact.

PROMISED AND REDISCOVERED LAND

THE world has a tendency to believe that the colonies fell, roasted and ready to eat, into Albion's toothy jaws, or that she merely bent forward to pick up the splendid territories dropped by her neighbours, whose strength was failing.

In fact, there is not a corner of this Empire which does not represent the application of daring exploits, military efforts, economic sacrifices, political manoeuvres, diplomatic negotiations, and by the investment of capital accumulated by generations of men who were curious, free of inertia, inconstancy, laziness or fear. This must be said because it is true : the history of England's conquest of the world is equal to our own colonial history in heroism, and her tenacity is greater than ours.

For four hundred years, the English have been carrying on a constant and inexorable struggle to protect the important points on the roads which dominate her Empire. Formerly these roads led to the riches of Africa and Asia ; to-day they show the way to human dramas, epidemics, famines and conflicts concerning castes and races. For many years the English fought against the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French ; against Hyder Ali, Tippoo Sahib, the Sepoys, the Afghans, the Burmese, the Boers and the

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Russians. To-day, while their profits are decreasing and their unpopularity is growing, they are fighting the plague, local politicians, enemy propaganda, attempts on the life of officials, usurers, the climate, the confusion of languages and religions, all the miseries of great modern industry.

To-day, these roads no longer bring the Empire rubies, spices and silks; they bring her responsibilities. The most recent of these responsibilities is, as everyone knows, Palestine.

Allenby conquered Palestine only to relieve Egypt and to remove the German-Turkish menace from the Suez Canal; the first British Commissioners organised this Promised Land with the sole purpose of giving the Zionists in the City and in Parliament moral and theoretical satisfaction. Now, since the creation of the air route to India, ten years ago, this Palestine has become the corner-stone of England's Asiatic power. More than that, because of the prodigious achievements of the Jewish colonists, this stone has become the philosopher's stone and everything which it touches is transformed into gold.

Before the War, the French Consul-General in Palestine, heir as he was of the traditions founded by the French Crusades and confirmed by the Capitulations, was considered the spiritual and civil leader of the Frankish population of Jerusalem. The *lingua franca*, that is to say, French, was the official language of the Holy City. Now, however, our representative is merely one diplomat among many others, French is a memory, and there are three official languages in Palestine, English, Arabic and Hebrew, and the real ruler is that British officer known as the High Commissioner.

His palace stands at the corner of the Jericho and the

PROMISED AND REDISCOVERED LAND

Naplouse roads, a splendid residence recently built with massive walls. It is separated from the rest of the city by a hill and rises from a fortified area. From here, the High Commissioner governs the capital and receives his subjects with regal ceremony, a rigid procedure, an imitation of Delhi. When he enters Saint Sepulchre to attend Divine service, he walks on the tombstone of his pious compatriot, that preceptor of Henry III of England who joined the Crusades in 1228 and died in Jerusalem. This stone, on which the inscriptions are worn away with age, covers the remains of this English Crusader. He has not been humiliated as were Godefroy de Bouillon or Baudouin and his grave was not desecrated by Orthodox priests. The centuries have respected his humble and admirable wish to be buried at the entrance to Christ's tomb, so that every Christian who entered the Church could step on him. This ever-present Englishman, this unobtrusive guardian of the sacred spot, seems to me to symbolise his country's activities in Palestine at the present time.

British protection was to be given alike to the two great human families inhabiting this country : the Jews and the Arabs. Before the War, the Jews numbered only about fifty thousand ; there are almost six times as many to-day, but they are still in the minority. And it is not good to be in a minority down there. Tolerance has never been a virtue of the Near East, which is the chief justification for European mandates. Probably, if the French or the English evacuated Syria or Palestine, massacres would follow.

England is therefore obliged to steer her course between

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the Jews and the Arabs. This is a difficult, changeable and dangerous task. The Zionist population has increased rapidly, not only because of the influx of immigrants from all countries, but because the race is very prolific, and in twenty years the Arabs will be in the minority. Already they know that their race is declining, and their riots are merely an expression of the bitterness this realisation has caused them.

England's responsibility to maintain order is a difficult one. She must treat Islam tactfully, as she needs the Mussulmen's great influence in India to restrain the Hindus. If England does not succeed in making the Arabs understand that, as masters of an immense and sparsely populated territory, it is unjust and unwise of them to hamper the productive efforts of the Jewish immigrants, she will be forced to create in Palestine a Jewish state analogous to that in Lebanon, to neutralise the Omar Mosque in Jerusalem. In other words, England would then be obliged to accept the consequences of the Balfour Declaration (of 1917) and of twenty years of Zionist policies. Until that happens, the Jews will cultivate their fields carrying a rifle. Having defended their domains at the risk of their lives, they will then have the sacred right of keeping them ; the land on which they live was a refuge provided for them by British generosity and by their great Zionist leaders. Riots and murders have given this land a new meaning ; these disturbances have created that alliance between the soil and human blood without which the land cannot become a true country.

CROSSING BEYROUTH

ON the other side of the Palestinian frontier, between the sea and the cornice-shaped road, Syria displays her charming little orchards, similar to Tyre and Sidon, which are not forced or standardised, her sweet-smelling cisterns among broken earthen walls; she displays her ewe lambs being led as of old by their shepherds, dressed in black, to the pasture on the outlying battlements of Lebanon, in the gentle quiet of springs and the Maronite faith.

Poor Syria envies enriched Palestine; why is she not, too, a Promised Land? Why has she no Jewish architects wearing golf trousers, no Jews wearing spectacles, exhausted from ploughing, estate agents who know how to increase the price of land so that it rises to three thousand francs a square metre in the urban districts? Beyrouth seems like a county town in a Swiss Canton as compared with the Palestinian boom, the cryptogamic growth of Jerusalem, the feverish activity of Haifa.

I was present in London, in 1916, during the first negotiations between Monsieur Georges-Picot, formerly our Consul-General in Beyrouth, and Sir Mark Sykes. The Allenby expedition and the new statutes of Palestine and Syria resulted from these diplomatic conversations. France demanded her ancient rights as the protector and liberator of the Christians in the Orient.

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This generous idea prevented us from carrying out a great plan: the creation of an Arabian Empire. We adopted a policy strengthening our local interests, but we neglected the policy which would have established our power in three districts which were separated but would have been easily gained: Fez, Karwan and Damar. In the same spirit we chose Beyrouth, the seat of our former consulate, as the capital; this town, with its back to the sea, has a Christian population. Undoubtedly, we should have shown more boldness and gone on to Damar. Why were we afraid of this Arabian centre, when, in North Africa, our relations with our Moslem subjects are so good? Damar, the terminus of the railway line to Mecca, was a world port. Damar controls the desert, and, in Arabian countries, the coasts lead nowhere and the desert everywhere. From Damar, by a sweeping movement, we should encircle Palestine, Egypt, the Sudan and Tripolitana in a vast net of French Islam, and the colonies of other countries would have become encysted; we should have effaced even the memory of Fashoda by exerting a tremendous moral domination over the route from the Cape to Cairo. One should reread the end of Lawrence's book, for despite himself, this Englishman, who hated France, showed us the way. To-day it is too late.

Have we at least attained the relatively unimportant goal we set ourselves? If France were to evacuate Syria to-morrow, would the Christian inhabitants be more secure than they were during the early years of our occupation, or before the War?

Is Beyrouth, which is neither a real capital nor a real port, at least a real relay station on our air route to India? Unfortunately our pilots come up against a blank wall;

CROSSING BEYROUTH

our regular hydroplanes, unable to cross the double mountain ranges in Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon, must land their international passengers, who break their journey to the Far East and go to Damar, on the other side of the mountain, where there is an airport. In sixteen years we have not succeeded in building an airport along the shore. If to-morrow we should finally have such a port, we should owe it to de Martel. When one considers the English and Dutch aeronautical achievement on the route to India, during the last six years, it is sad to realise that we have not, as yet, been able to establish in Syria a suitable or even a possible airport for our lines to the Far East. In our age, when time is precious, and slow England herself is going to reduce the flying time from London to Calcutta from six to two days, our aeroplane passengers must drive across country for three hundred kilometres by motor-car (why not by mule ?) to reach the Damar airport because none exists in Beyrouth.

ALEXANDRETTA

ALEXANDRETTA has not been successful as a port. The landscape is charming at the frontier of northern Syria. The straight coast is abruptly broken up by the first buttresses of Anatolia, and then sweeps on towards the west. This is the beginning of that huge peninsula, Asia Minor, which stretches out into the Oriental Mediterranean towards Cyprus, Rhodes and Ægeus, like an old bow window overlooking a square.

I remember when, long ago, Alexandretta failed to become the great port of the *Baghdadbahn*. I also remember when the allied General Staffs decided to use Alexandretta as the base for an attack against the Turks. This was during the winter before the Dardanelles, at a time when our chancelleries were not afraid to promise Constantinople to the Russians. . . . Alexandretta was not, however, to have a great destiny. She remained a *sanjak* town and only the monthly steamer of the *Messageries Maritimes* calls at her port regularly. Occasionally an American ship comes to collect a cargo of liquorice wood. The snow-covered peak of the Djebeli el Ahmar shelters the *mahonnes* and the schooners with sloping masts.

Alexandretta has the only good natural harbour between Smyrna and Bizerta, and the town is proud of the fact that it saw a cargo of Egyptian cedar wood leaving these

ALEXANDRETTA

shores for the first sea voyage recorded by history. Nevertheless, Alexandretta has not known how to make her fortune. She has a Mosque, a white lighthouse, a winding staircase and a pontoon-bridge hardly worthy of Lake Enghine, but it would take a great deal of imagination to make a business centre of her warehouses and her avenues, and to build up her green charming slopes, where there are poplars rising as straight as jets of water, among wild irises, small cyclamens and blossoming furze.

It is not that Alexandretta is isolated, on the contrary, but the country in the interior is the Turkish frontier. The Turks have passed here once and they may do so again. This, possibly, has deprived the Armenians and the Greeks, the human mangroves without which our race could not take root in the marchlands of the Orient, of their desire to own land or to work.

CYPRUS

SIR RONALD STORRS, the British governor of Cyprus, remained calm when he saw the bits of glass from his windows broken by Greek rioters. He said : "I did not know that there were so many windows in my house."

Cyprus, too, has more openings on to the horizon than one would imagine : from Cape Greco, in the east, the island overlooks Lebanon ; from Kerynia, in the north, she can see the Caramania ; from Cyprus one can reach Tripoli in an hour by air and Port Said in two. Cyprus watches over the maritime route from Constantinople to Egypt, and, at her feet, lie dispersed the islands of the Ægean Sea. The Egyptians enjoy summer holidays on this long calcareous island, dominating the blue surging sea with her white cliffs, her fortresses, her shadowy buttresses. The Egyptian guests, waiting for the day to grow cooler, sit under the shadowy trees, the last survivals of the many trees once growing on this island. Cyprus formerly supplied the Orient with all the Trireme wood it needed, except that coming from Athos or Lebanon.

The Greeks from Alexandria who come by the Khedive Line to Kythroea, Troodos or Platres, find Greek brothers in Cyprus, for since the days of Homeric Mycenæ, under the Egyptian, Persian, French, Genoese, Venetian, Turkish

CYPRUS

or English masters, these Greeks have never ceased to be the true owners of this soil.

Cyprus, this island of Aphrodite, has passed from hand to hand, like a beautiful captive. Richard the Lion Heart sold it to the Knights Templars, who, in turn, ceded it to Guy de Lusignan. In the palace cellars blacker than his skin, Othello soothed his tormenting jealousy under the cool Roman arches which open on to the shore.

The kingdom of Lusignan was the Crusaders' last port of call before they reached Asiatic soil, which, on fine days, they could see in the distance from the high ramparts of Famagusta. The protective Provençal or Burgundian fortifications made them feel that they had reached the end of their journey, and they filled the hundred churches of the town with their votive offerings. In the Cathedral of Saint Nicholas—transformed into a Mosque of the purest Gothic style ; the tower at the left, reminiscent of Reims, is capped, curiously enough, with a minaret—the kings of Cyprus were crowned kings of Jerusalem. When, driven from the Holy Land, the Franks were forced to leave Acre, where they had tried desperately to retain a foothold, they remained obstinately in Cyprus for three centuries, but as their legal code they continued to recognise the *Assises de Jerusalem*.

The Venetians came to Cyprus indirectly, by artful ways ; not knowing how to conserve three centuries of French heroism, they abandoned this heritage to the Sultan. The Turks, who loved food, kept no part of the Grand Commandery, which the Hospitallers had transferred to Cyprus when they left Acre, but the sugar mills. The Turks shipped only cane syrup or the heads of decapitated pilgrims to Stamboul. . . . Under their yoke,

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Cyprus, too, was as effete and as insipid as Turkish delight. And even the horrible concrete with which the Ottomans filled up the beautiful Christian fortifications looks like icing on thick sugar. To-day the English, stung to the quick by the art with which their neighbours, the Italian archæologists, have reconditioned Rhodes, have finally decided to clear away the indigestible cement paste in Cyprus.

Even inside the port of Larnaca, the water is so pure and the sand so white that it is a relief to see them unspoiled by workshops or warships. It is surprising that there is none : England is in evidence everywhere in the world, but she remains unobtrusive at Cyprus. She established order and a system of justice, she rooted out highway robbery, she allowed the Greeks to cultivate their land in peace, and then she retired to the background. She has not taken advantage of the island's strategic position. There is a provisional aerodrome, a simple wooden landing-pontoon guarded by a fat sailor ; but no soldiers, no dispatch-vessel are in sight. Cyprus, as an isolated part of John Bull's Empire, may, however, from one day to the next, be transformed into a fortified bulwark.

Disraeli came to the island when he was a popular novelist travelling for pleasure. Fifty years later, when he was Prime Minister, he annexed Cyprus, under the pretext that as the Russians had taken Kars and Batoum from the weak Ottoman Empire, England had a right to be compensated. Actually, England had just bought shares in the Suez Canal, she had begun to grasp the road to India, and she needed ports in the Oriental Mediterranean. The Admiralty, however, was not convinced that Cyprus would be a good naval base ; nor is it quite

CYPRUS

sure of this to-day. But the great Minister was more far-sighted than the sailors, he remained firm. He told Parliament that, not his Mediterranean, but his Indian policy had prompted him to take Cyprus.

In 1903 Turkey accorded the concession for the *Baghdad-bahn* via Angora to a group of German banks, thus violating the preferential clauses of the Turkish decree favouring the Haidar Pasha Railway, an English line. Then England understood the importance of Lord Beaconsfield's ideas : Cyprus threatened the German railway from the side.

The negotiations concerning Egypt's complete independence are progressing ; the prestige of Malta is declining and the island is gradually becoming a mere base of supplies ; the unrest in Palestine points towards a far-reaching Arabian revolt, and England, realising that her strategic naval bases are weakening, has again considered fortifying and arming Cyprus. It is said that the Admiralty, acting on Sir Ronald Storr's wise advice, will perhaps, if the depths of the sea and the resources of the budget permit, convert Famagusta into a great naval base ; war hydroplanes will land on the salty inland lake, west of Limasol, and half a dozen airports for the use of civil planes on their way to India will be constructed on the island.

Aphrodite will put on a helmet and cover herself with a shield.

In these matters England decides quickly, and she does not hesitate to make changes. Portsmouth, Plymouth, Chatham, excellent naval bases until 1916, were abandoned as soon as submarine warfare began. Then Rosyth, Milford Haven and Scapa Flow, in northern Scotland, took their place. To-day, when England is threatened by air attacks, the problem has already been studied and

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decisions have been made. While we are asking ourselves whether our aeroplane workshops shall be moved to Chartres or to Mons, our British neighbours are preparing to move their war industries to India, to South Africa, or better still to Newfoundland, where fogs will protect them from enemy aircraft. The new committee for the co-ordination of war problems, set up by the great Committee for the Defence of the Empire, will meet in London during the Coronation. This committee, an instrument of vigilance, is unhampered by considerations of distance or of expense. The protection of the road to India is more far-reaching than this road itself; the safety of this road will be assured by nets laid at the Hebrides as well as by cemented domes at the Cape of Good Hope.

R H O D E S

WHEN this superb fraternity (the Knights of Rhodes) was obliged to yield to courage as great as theirs, to faith as sincere, and to robbers even more dexterous and audacious than the noblest knight who ever sang a canticle to the Virgin, these halls were filled by magnificent Pashas and Agas, who lived here in the intervals of war, and having conquered its best champions, despised Christendom and Chivalry pretty much as an Englishman despises the Frenchmen.

W. M. THACKERAY : *Notes of a Journey from*

Cornhill to Grand Cairo.

Rhodes, like Cyprus, is silent and deserted, but Rhodes is interesting for a different reason ; her tragedy is enacted in the Southern Mediterranean and her rocky sentinels are now condemned to gaze out upon lonely seas. Sheltered by the Caramanian mountains, at the most southern corner of Asia Minor, where Doric Chersonesus plunges her buttresses as far as the Ægean, the new Rhodes can be seen side by side with the ancient, the white next to the yellow, stone next to plaster. Rhodes seems to be waiting for things which do not happen.

Once a week the plane from Brindisi ploughs through the sky above the island, and then this metal monoplane with three engines, pulled by a vedette-boat, moves silently but magnificently into the harbour under the sinking sun.

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The raised wings glide between the two columns of the port, one of which bears the she-wolf of Rome and the other the stag of Rhodes. The hydroplane passes as though in review the Ægean fishing boats, schooners with high sterns and straight masts, like those of fifteenth-century caravels. In the background, the rocks and the snowy mountain peaks of Asia Minor are outlined against the blue sky, lightly shading off into a reddish mist. The three propellers, each with three blades, come to rest in front of the old windmill on the mole. A gold light falls obliquely on the notched walls of this fortified city, and the straight lines of the walls are broken by cylinders topped with cubes.

In Fascist Rhodes everything seems new, especially the older parts of the island. Not a speck of dust is visible on the custom official's boots, not a scrap of waste paper is lying about on the quay ; not a lemon floats about rotting in the water of the port. Every stone is in place in the pyramids decorating the ramparts, every staircase has been repaired in the style of its period. Not a petal is strewn about the earth of this Island of Roses ; the drying nets have been mended and there are no tears in the jerseys worn by the aviation mechanics. On these garments one can read in large letters *Ala Littoria*. The entire island is prepared for a detailed inspection, the cisterns are full of oil, the pointed guns stand ready under their canvas covers, and there are more guns like them on every island of the Dodecanese, chiefly at Leros and Patmos, great naval bases of the Ægean Sea.

The Knights of Saint John of Jerusalem distinguished themselves in the Holy Land more by the wounds they inflicted than by their healing powers. Rhodes was a

RHODES

secret refuge of Christianity. When the Crusaders abandoned Jerusalem, they first retired to Acre, then to Cyprus, and finally to Rhodes, where they remained for two centuries. They could not make up their minds to leave this Orient which had become their home, until their Grand Master, Villiers of the Isle d'Adam, chose Malta as their final refuge.

They fortified the Island of Rhodes and organised seven and then eight nations or "languages", united for mutual defence. Everything on the island still testifies to this fraternity of arms. These Knights lived in the Road of the Knights, where every language has its "inn", and where even to-day the Gothic houses stand close together, grouped round the hospital like pointed arches round a monastery. The Hospitallers' coupled shields decorate the arches of their common refectory with heraldic designs. On the road round the ramparts, iron hands in steel gauntlets, these military monks formed a mystic circle, a magnetic ring which Saracen magicians tried their utmost to break and which was finally shattered by Suliman the Magnificent.

Each of the Languages of Rhodes had its own quarters, from one gateway or bastion to another. The German Language was stationed from the Amboise Gate, the town gate reinforced with iron, to the portcullis of the Bastion of Saint George: the area of the Auvergne Language beginning at the Spanish Tower, faced the sea across the battlements, and these Knights could aim their attacks from the esplanade. The Knights of the Aragonese Language, living between this tower and the Dungeon of Saint Mary, and facing the windmills, could shoot well from this sheltered spot. The English Language occupied

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the façade between the salient angle of the Tower of Saint Mary at the Coshino Gate. Then came the Language of Provence with its mortars and fireballs and culverins, weapons copied from the Moors, these European masters in the science of artillery. The Languages of Portugal and Castile guarded the district from the gateway of Commerce to the Belfry of Naillac, with the deadly arms which, later, the Turks changed without much trouble into *moucharabiehs*. Finally, the well-tried Knights of the French Language were entrusted with the protection of the entire shore beneath the port, between the Naillac Tower and the Amboise Gate, where, on the galley-ships of the Order, their standards, their triangular pennants and red hangings with white crosses, waved in the breeze, caressing the forecastles on the gilded sterns of the ships.

Each Language had its Judge, and these judges formed the Chapter, which was presided over by the Grand Master. Each of the Knights, without interpreters or dragomen, promised to perform their share in the defence and the administration of the island. Rhodes, facing Asia, was a microcosm of Europe in arms.

For once, the Tower of Babel was organised.

These war-like monks assembled like the Apostles, and above the Hospitallers, too, rose a tongue of fire, and the Spirit guarded each of these Languages in Rhodes, the spirit of wisdom and of intelligence, the spirit of good counsels, of force and defence.

Why cannot the European Faith accomplish to-morrow what the Christian Faith accomplished yesterday? Why cannot we, as they did in Rhodes, from one end of our common civilisation to another, man our towers with

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vigilant watchers? In our watch-towers drunken watchmen have gone to sleep, uttering a curse at a time when state treasuries are empty, when hunger is stalking the streets, when the postern gates of the west are being assailed, while Rhodes, this walled-in city, a living miracle of the Pentecost, teaches the lesson of solidarity. Rhodes' towers rise, facing Asia as a warning, as an imperious call to that fraternity practised by the Hospitallers.

CAPE SUNIUM

CAPE SUNIUM, one of the oldest stage settings of classic tragedies, is one of the first things the traveller, already searching the Acropolis, sees when he arrives.

Neglected by man, and shaken by the side winds, the Temple of Poseidon has gradually crumbled away. The ruins have rolled down the slope to the cliffed shore. Below, I saw shafts and drums of columns among the rocks; the waves wash the flutings which have been spared by the winds; thus that which belongs to Neptune returns to the sea.

"At one glance", to quote Voltaire, I can see from my comfortable seat in the aeroplane, Attica, Eubœa, Ægina and the Cyclades. All the great navies sailed along this route: the Greek fleet on the way to Troy, with eighty Triremes flying the Royal Standard, the Persian and the Athenian ships, the Byzantine and Venetian vessels, the Crusaders' White Ships and the Turkish galleons, the three-masted British warships belonging to George IV, and the modern troop ships on their way to the Dardanelles. What a splendid dress-circle Cape Sunium was!

The pedestals were transformed into steles bearing inscriptions, and I remember seeing Byron's name, surrounded by red, with those of other English officers who

CAPE SUNIUM

were stationed here a century ago. I know nothing more beautiful in Greece than this naval watch-tower, than the sun rising under the architraves, the clouds clinging to them, in stormy days, or when, at the close of day, one sits on the large calcareous rocks, the huge and natural benches of the fragile column shafts of crumbling marble. Like a blue cord, this horizon unites the centres of these columns, which seem to be made of salt, and are a shimmering rose colour when the sun sinks behind Corinthia.

Planes from all the air-lines bound for Athens now meet on this expanse of water, this liquid wharf, where the greatest Naumachies of classic antiquity occurred. From the south, where they have left Egypt, and flying over Crete and Mount Ida, come the silver-winged planes of the *Imperial Airways* and of the *K.L.M.* From the north, the planes belonging to the Polish and the Greek line in Salonika reach Athens after flying over Marathon. Planes on their way to the Far East arrive from the west. Cutting through the sky in the east, the large four-engined planes of the *Air France*, the first French hydroplanes worthy of the name, arrive from Beyrouth and are followed by the *Espresso del Levante*, which, crossing the Dodecanese, fly from Rhodes to Rome in a day. The passengers in the cabins of these planes, in the shadow of the enormous yellow and green metal wings, can see from this great height the other express plane of the *Ala Littoria*, arriving in Athens from Stamboul.

PHALERUM

IN the waiting-room at Phalerum, on the road to Athens, all the aviation companies, through their posters, try to force hesitant travellers to decide in their favour ; these posters gleam with bright colours, proclaiming the marvels of the Orient ; they display elephants in the bush, naked women, their breasts wreathed in flowers, and sunsets behind appalling volcanoes. These posters are as noisy and as obtrusive as the population is silent and discreet. The porters and the chauffeurs do not roar, the shoeblacks are not insistent ; foreigners are not treated as quarry. This is the first quiet Mediterranean crowd we met on this journey.

The houses are like small rose crystals without transparency or flashiness. The sky is growing paler over the gardenless houses, scattered about in the yellow dust of the plain. There are no shadows : noon, in advance here by several hours, has dispersed them all, and the odour of Greece, when the day is hottest, is a mixture of burning plants, roasting coffee, cooked oil and resin.

Greek civil servants, spurred on by the zeal recently shown by their Turkish colleagues, run about with bulky portfolios stuffed with reports which they inflict on pilots of the regular services who have involuntarily flown over an invisible gun behind some Doric column. *Æschylus*

PHALERUM

belongs to the world, but the Bay of Salamis is the property of the Ministry of War, and decrees placarded almost everywhere imperiously remind passengers, somewhat blasé after an air journey of ten thousand kilometres, that strategic points and frontiers are very important.

Phalerum is the cross-road before the last on the road to India. From here, everyone takes the short cut. The hydroplanes begin to snort, churn up torrents of water, and rise into the blue air to dry their hulls without keels or steps, and their window-panes coated with salty water ; the aeroplanes, surrounded by wireless waves and sea-gulls, graze the waves with their useless wheels. Both types of planes rise to a great height as their valves rattle and their engines roar, for, after crossing the minute channel of Corinth, they will now fly over the high mountains of Anatolia, the craters of Epirot, and then on towards Corfu and the Ionian Sea.

“A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” I think that this flat mangy country over which our plane is flying in large circles would not have seemed fragrant if we had not known that it was called Salamis. . . . That railway over there with the narrow tracks leading over Peloponnesus would not have interested us, if we had not known that it passes through Mycenæ, rich in gold. . . .

Mountains of Argolis, where, in the cool depths of the rocks, the Atridæ slept, at the feet of the gigantic palace like the Peruvian fortresses of Cuzco ; snow-capped Parnassus which protected the Delphic olive trees from the northern wind ; Olympus herself, dry pustule on the rugged skin of Thessalia, if she remained so great, was this not due to the poets ?

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Though I was so far above these celebrated heights, which gave birth to our entire civilisation, this did not make them seem less magnificent. Our aeroplane approaches the sky, bringing us closer to geography and history ; it reconciles us with gods, priests and professors. An hour's flight gave me a better understanding of Macedonia than a year in a classroom, and the Peloponnesian Wars frightened me no longer. Between half-past eleven in the morning and a quarter to four in the afternoon I passed through all the philosophies, all the expressions of art on which we are nourished ; Epicurism and the New Academy, Eclecticism and Sophistry, the school of Miletus and of Heraclitus. At Athens I saw the Indian Mail which goes on to Egypt, following in its course the decline of Greek thought, and the large plane which, a few hours later, would fly over Alexandria and Plotinus. . . .

Beneath me I had seen the entire classical world of the Mediterranean, the land of the Humanities, without which nothing would have existed for the men of the Renaissance, nothing would exist to-day for men with a university education. With one glance, I saw the coasts of Albania, Corfu and Greece, dimly outlined in the morning mist, so like dawn of the day. The air was so pure that at last I understood what Aristotelian meteorologists mean by the word ether, that freedom of substance which admits of no contrariety or change ; that Hellenic air which is always young, always willing to yield to propellers, this is our real "Greek miracle".

BRINDISI

BRINDISI has dressed up since she became an aerial base on the road to India. The school children wearing sailor suits, armed with small rifles and equipped with bags containing gas masks—the new masks of the *Commedia del Arte*—create a sense of immature but perfect order. The number of Italian and English hydroplane hangars has been greatly increased. A long landing-field has been added to the maritime airport. From here planes taking off daily for Rome, to fly over the Apennines, rise to Andean heights. This great height is necessary; the French planes, not powerful enough to reach it, crashed against the Apennines.

Each time I embarked by sea or air at Brindisi, I walked through the hotel lobby where the samples of that product, which is called a traveller, meet during transportation; this human product is fresh and new when it leaves home and worn out when it reaches its destination. Occasionally, making use of a few hours' time between the arrival of the Calais-Brindisi and the departure of the aeroplane, I walked as far as Bari to revisit the fort and the Church of the Normans of Sicily, or else, collapsing into one of the willow chairs of the little Hotel International, I went over the last post from the West while I waited for the plane. Near me sat some Englishmen, their sun

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helmets attached to their cases by the chin straps, as a basket is held by the handle. These officers of His Majesty, with their odd steel boxes, resembling fumigators, which protect the plumes or the point of their helmets, were vieing with Mediterranean flies to get a dreary breakfast of dried biscuits and Dutch cheese.

At the doors of the hotel, at the extreme end of the mole, like a last nail in the Italian boot, there has been enthroned for several years a Maltese money-changer, who relieves foreigners of Egyptian pounds, dinars, drachmas or piastres. (The first mirage encountered by travellers in the Orient is the mirage of exchanges, a stupefying three-card trick in which he is always the loser.) Posted on the walls of the money-changer's booth are the market prices of cotton, rubber and tin ; the prices of gold ingots in Madras and the rate of interest at Mysore. These flashing and distant perspectives rouse homesickness or nausea, depending on the mood of the traveller or the state of his liver.

Passengers arriving from Brindisi by air are precipitated with the Fascists' love of order and impetuosity from the hydroplane into the aeroplane in ten minutes, including the time spent at the customs and the inspection of passports. Already passengers are swept round (in a short circle according to the Italian custom) the castle built by Frederick II, which this Charlemagne in a turban, this excommunicated Crusader, built as a last farewell to the Islam he loved. Then the travellers see, rising above the town, that beautiful Byzantine column erected within the confines of the two Empires of the West and the East. Brindisi is the living hinge of the two Mediterranean basins.

BRINDISI

Here, at the extreme point of the peninsula, is the *Imperial Airways'* harbour for the flying fleet used on the route to India. But in a few months this will be different. At Rochester on the Thames, at the spot where the old shipyards equipped Elizabeth's fleet which defeated the Armada, aviation works have been established; here a type of plane is being constructed which will entirely change the British air-lines. The familiar silhouettes of the old biplanes will disappear from Croydon and Gatwick. The new monoplanes, which are now being manufactured, are enormous hydroplanes of twenty tons with four engines. They will fly night and day, conveying sleeping passengers across seas and continents, and reaching India in two days and a half.

After 1937 the aerial route to India will have five weekly services as far as Calcutta, and ten to Alexandria. These planes will have a speed of three hundred and twenty kilometres an hour. It is not yet known whether next year Portsmouth or Southampton will have the honour of becoming the aerial terminus of this new Imperial line. The planes of this line will not land anywhere in a foreign country.

On the shores of the Channel, at the airports of Millbrook or Langstone Harbour, we shall see this world net converging: one transatlantic line will arrive from New York by way of the Azores, another will take off from West Africa via Gibraltar and the Canary Islands; a third will fly without stopping from Karachi to London.

And we?

For a thousand years, by land and by sea, Frenchmen have gone to India. As this road to India is now an

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aerial road will we surrender our rank on it without an effort? France has ceased to be an inevitable stopping-place on the road to the Orient; the time has passed when Palmerston negotiated a treaty with Thiers for the transit of English goods from the Orient through France, when Marseilles rejoiced in 1867 because the city had acquired the privilege of being the terminus for the Indian mail. Aeroplanes have made England independent of us. It is our task to emancipate ourselves from the tyranny of the sea and of the land, a tyranny as old as the globe, a tyranny of natural roads, subject to conditions of declivity, temperature, seasons, altitudes, a tyranny which is no longer justified. Commercial, religious, ethnic and political roads no longer exist; there is only one passage, that of speed cutting through the air; there is only one law of human transportation, and that is the straight line. The necessity of supremacy on land and on sea, which conditioned the politics of our ancestors since barter was first carried on during the Neolithic age, vanished with the conquest of space. Soon there will be only one route to India, the most unsubstantial of all, the road of the air. Will our quick-thinking people decide to take their place on this new route?

THE MEDITERRANEAN

THE steep shores of the Mediterranean favoured the beginners in one of humanity's most daring enterprises, and the enchanting inland Sea of classic adventure has led mankind gently from headland to headland, from bay to bay, from island to island, out into the promise of world-wide oceans beyond the Pillars of Hercules.

J. CONRAD : *Mirror of the Sea.*

I have known more turbulent waters, more unreasonable seas, I have also known calmer bodies of water, soothed by their own weight and their excess of salt. I have seen oceans more tepid, more cosmic and more fermentable, with waves leaving a kind of jelly on the meshes of the nets : these oceans are real mothers of the sea, and pregnant with worlds. The Mediterranean alone simultaneously satisfies the body and the spirit ; no other sea is human and yet sacred, famous and yet familiar. I have crossed the Mediterranean in every direction, from the Balearic Islands to the Cyclades, from Tyre to Monte Carlo, from Gibraltar to Mount Athos, from Genoa to Lesbos, from Salonica to Oran ; I need not divide the Mediterranean into two basins as geographers do ; I can think of this sea in her entirety and love her as a whole. Every bathe I have had in the Mediterranean has revived me. I have experienced heavy storms on the Mediter-

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anean, winds which churn the sea like a sauce ; I have known the delicious surge of her sunny breezes, her phosphorescent nights, her burning salt, her little suave swell caused by the sudden change of her coastal winds, her excellent western wind sent by Athena, her unfavourable easterly winds, the white prairies of her beds beneath the water, I know all of these. Every year, towards the spring, I return to her like the sprats, and then I realise that the gods have not yet forsaken me. This pool of purification renews its miracles for me ; this pool with a large bath in the Orient and a small one in the Occident, separated by Italy as though by a diving-board.

The Mediterranean, so sweet to see, so bitter to taste, is encircled from Hyères to Cadiz, from Sardinia to Nauplia by the whiteness of saline marshes. These "caves of Neptune"—as the poets of Louis XIII called this deep sea—under the roofs of their shining waves, are filled with very salty wine, concentrated essence of the sea's substance, as strong as a liqueur made with salt instead of sugar, a propitious setting for the combination of seaweeds, for the disintegration of wrecks, essential oil for madrepores, a kind of infusion of a thousand flowers and fruits of the sea in which the hanging substances are so numerous, it is said, that the Mediterranean derives from them her saltiness and the deep blue of her colouring.

Mossy, grey oceans, the colour of vitriol, stretch out indefinitely and their liquid expanses are boundless ; the Mediterranean, on the other hand, enclosed in a vessel of baked earth, cannot expand. On the contrary, this sea is contracting like the shagreen skin of our western power ; the Mediterranean is the last relic of a unique ocean which once encircled the earth, and then retreated, in successive

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recessions, from Asia Major to Asia Minor and from the Danube to the Alps. Then this sea stood still—bitter as an outcast queen—withdrew into herself, became precious and profound. In southern Italy, Greece, Crete and the shores of Africa, the Mediterranean seems to be hiding the mysteries of her origin in large black chasms lined with cobalt ; and at the surface of these chasms she is concealing the less distant mystery of our classical life.

Low shores are rare along the Mediterranean ; as a rule high mountains protect her coast, dividing the clouds and forming a circular structure, an amphitheatre of olive trees. The olive tree writhes in painful contortion to raise its root-like trunk from the earth (why have we chosen the most tormented of trees as the symbol of peace ?). Human industry supports the trees by constructing terraces on the natural slope, laid bare by rain and wind. I saw these terraces in Sicily and in Eze, at Sidon and at Oran, at Delphi and San Remo. The reddish earth of these embanked slopes, grooved with furrows parallel with the coast and already the colour of the African soil, changes from the ochre of the Agayan and Estorel rocks to the Algerian or Lebanese madder red. At the time when the gods were not yet parcelling out the earth, the same blood seems to have been shed there for all men alike, and the Phœnician purple dyed not only the Syrian shore with carmine, but all of the Mediterranean coast as well.

Though the Mediterranean gave birth to the serenity of Antiquity, though this sea established laws, just as legal codes were created by lands (the Code Byzantine, the Law of Rhodes, the Amalfi Tablets, the Catalonian Ordinances, which from the sixth to the eleventh centuries determined the world statutes governing navies and which

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were plagiarised by the Northern Hanseatic Cities), this body of water is nonetheless one of the most oscillating and impulsive factors of our old world. North winds and mistrals, siroccos and simoons, khamains, winds of the desert and of the snow, beat angrily against the sea, and the regularly recurrent etesian winds churn her every season. Volcanoes convulse the bed of the Mediterranean, disturb her underwater fields, cause her surface to seethe, and shatter her rocks. The Mediterranean volcanoes, less terrible than those in America or Asia, nevertheless maintain artful subterranean connections with their distant relatives, but instead of spewing up continents of fire, islands of mud and sulphur, they are satisfied with vomiting a few distracted philosophers, or some sandals, or a *funiculi* melody. These volcanoes are the Mediterranean's only means of remaining in touch with heroic barbarism ; tired at times of the extremely conventional rôle to which she is restricted, she shows, by her tears of lava, her sulphurous combustion, her backfiring, her nephritic digestion, that she has the will to remain a part of the origins and the future of the world. For the same song has so consistently been sung about the Mediterranean, man so enjoys repeating the fact that this sea contains so little animal life, that nature is subjugated in the sea for all time : there are no fish, or birds, or tides in the Mediterranean, which is like a woman in the menopause, who has lost the radiance of her sex. For so long this erroneous attitude has been adopted towards the Mediterranean that we shall end by rousing in the sea a profound desire for a telluric life, a subconscious conflict and geological depravity, which will lead her to desperate excesses. Disgusted by the remarks of professors that marble gods are more beautiful than the sun,

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or that the *Cannebière* is the heir of the Acropolis, the Mediterranean, in despair, might, mockingly, turn into a sweet water lake or into an aquarium ; or her desire for vengeance might prompt her to transform herself into a Sahara desert, a forest of sponges, a few chalky plains, a rotting moon or a huge battlefield.

Is it humiliating for the Mediterranean to remind her that a navigator never loses sight of her shores ? Is it not useful that this liaison sea between peoples, this central ocean, should be ever present ? “ Like frogs round a sailor, we are all seated round the shores of the Sea,” Plato said. During the Renaissance savage continents as well as human consciousness were explored, and the Mediterranean received a blow, but before that time she was the horizon of the world, our ancestors’ school of navigation. On her, a sea during the winter, and a river during the summer, man learned how to paddle, to handle a scull. To-day—as a kind of island of water surrounded by land—the Mediterranean is as moving as a pool in a garden. We love her because of her great age and her youthful face, for the wrinkles of this sea never last. Her surface shows no traces of the first rudderless ships, rigged with a single sail unfit to keep the bitter wind ; of the papyrus rafts, the vessels listed in the *Iliad*, the Phœnician barks, those Jews of the sea, with their order books for Baltic resin or tin from Cornwall, the painted sails of which were let down every evening on the halyards, of the Crusaders’ ships with vertical forecastles, of the triremes, the galleys, the Doge’s ships, the ships with spanker sails, the *caïques* and the large Venetian galleys of the Great Turk, and the galliots and the store-ships of the King. The Mediterranean has effaced the rents inflicted in her surface by the

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wooden prows of the *feluccas* which sailed near the expanding Tartan coast, the tears made by the steel bows of cruisers from Toulon and the racing boats from Cannes or San Remo. The combinations of these waves are as countless as were ideas in antiquity when there was always enough material for new thoughts, and when no fog ever obscured this vision.

The Mediterranean was the most important medium of exchange in the old world; her shores witnessed the developments of the great cross-roads of history, Tyre, Alexandria, Constantinople, Venice; this sea was the centre of a nervous system which set distant peoples in motion; the development of Germany cannot be completely explained without the Popes, nor that of England or France without Cæsar, nor Russia without Byzantium, nor the empires of the Sudan without the salt caravans of Algeria, nor Persia without Greece, nor India without Alexander, nor China without Saint Francis Xavier, nor America without Christopher Columbus and the *conquistadors*. Suddenly to-day, the Mediterranean is once more a radiating centre: she has again become the hub of international roads, of those great air routes which France, England and Holland are converging towards her in a tightened knot before directing them towards their Indian possessions. For the Mediterranean aerial navigation is of tremendous importance: political issues, which reflect geography, have been confused by this development; politics have undergone a greater change during the last six months than they had since the opening of the Suez Canal.

Railways follow a zigzag course like human experience; aeroplanes fly direct like human thought. Rivers

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and the sea, fords and mountain passes restrain peoples and confine them to traditional politics. The air, on the other hand, is free and permits of every kind of combination ; the work carried on by governments begins to depend on the radius of action, more or less far-reaching, of this or that aeroplane, that is to say on the capacity of a reservoir, or on the horse-power of an engine : to-day, therefore, the destiny of empires is being decided on the testing-stand of engineers. . . .

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